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VERNEY COURT:

AN IRISH NOVEL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE WITCH-THORN," "THE TWELFTH RIG," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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VERNEY COURT:

AN IRISH NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S STORY.

"TWENTY years ago I was at Brighton. I had gone there with an English lady who was in delicate health, as her attendant. I remember it was August when we went, and the place was crowded with fashionable people. It was my first situation, and it didn't last long. The lady died a very short time after we went to Brighton. I wasn't always obliged

to be in a situation, Miss Melville. My husband was a very respectable man, and would have been very well off if he had lived, for he was steady, and clever at his business. But I lost him when we had been married only a few years, and then I had to take a situation. Well, after the death of the lady, I had to look out again. I advertised. The first reply I had was a few lines in a gentleman's hand, requesting C. B. L.—those were the letters to my advertisement—to call at a certain hotel in Brighton. I went, and there met Mr. Verney."

"Was he very different looking then from what he now is?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed he was. His figure was erect as a pillar, and he was a tall man, almost as tall as Mr. Nugent. Most people would have called him handsome, for his features were

good as regarded shape, and that, but there was a look about his face which didn't prepossess me. His hair and eye-brows were coal black, and the light blue eyes beneath such heavy, dark brows had a strange look. There wasn't the same cold expression in them then that there is now, but they had a queer, restless flash, and he had a way sometimes of fixing them on a person that made one feel unable to stir hand or foot till he removed them. I've seen him fix his wife in this way, and then she would sit fascinated and half mesmerised before him. If ever any eyes had the power of mesmerising, his had.

"Well, he told me he wanted a person to attend on Mrs. Verney, and to accompany her in her walks when he was unable to do so, that my duties would be light, and he would raise my salary after the first quarter if I gave

satisfaction. I remember it all as if it had but happened yesterday. So I was engaged, and went the following day.

"When I was introduced to Mrs. Verney, I thought her the loveliest looking lady I had ever seen. Her beauty took me altogether by surprise. She seemed to me more like an angel than a common mortal. She was very like what Miss Catherine is now, but there was a sweet, sad look in her beautiful eyes that made me feel drawn towards her, and when she spoke, it was in such a gentle voice, and to utter such kind words, that I loved her at once. 'I hope you will be happy and comfortable with me,' said she. 'I shall try all in my power to make you so. I am very glad to have a companion, and I hope you will like me.' She smiled, and then her eyes filled up with tears. Poor, beautiful, lonely young creature! It was easy to see she was

unhappy, and I guessed that her husband was the cause. Her eyes would often fill up that way without any apparent reason, and I knew that she sometimes took fits of crying in her own room. One time, when Mr. Verney was out, and I thought she was with him, I went to get a dress that I was to alter, and I found she was there. She was kneeling on the floor, with her face buried in her two hands, crying and sobbing pitifully, and a ring was lying on the chair before her. It wasn't her marriage ring, or any I had ever seen her wear. She hadn't heard me open the door, so I closed it again softly, and stole away.

"She had a mortal fear of her husband. He seemed to have power to make her do just whatever he wished—no matter how much averse to it she might previously have been—simply by looking at her. He ruled her, not by love, but by a kind of mesmeric

power that he had gained over her. One great cause of her unhappiness, I soon found, was his jealousy. He was of a terribly jealous nature. He couldn't bear that any gentleman should so much as look at her, and, of course, it was impossible for her to go anywhere and not be looked at, she was so beautiful. He would flash a glance that had death in it, at the offender, and scowl on his wife as if it were her fault. His eyes were never off her face, except when he looked round to see if any one else's were there, too. She was afraid to raise her eyes, or smile, because he would say she did it to attract attention. He loved her, there is no doubt of that, passionately, desperately, but it is a curse, rather than a blessing, to be loved by a man of his nature.

"I soon found that I was wanted more to watch than to wait; that Mr. Verney ex-

pected me to act as a spy on his wife, and inform him of everything she did and said, and if she ever met or spoke to any one when out walking with me. What he had said when engaging me, about raising my salary after the first quarter if I gave satisfaction, had evidently been for the purpose of encouraging me to please him in this way. As soon as he gave me the first hint that this was what he wanted, I spoke out very bold, for I felt roused, and told him I wondered any gentleman wouldn't be ashamed to say he wanted his wife spied on, that I was a respectable woman, though I was obliged to earn my bread, and that I wasn't going to act such a part.

"'But don't you think,' said he, 'that it would be wrong for a lady to have meetings with a gentleman, without the knowledge of her husband?'

"'Of course I do,' I answered, very indignant, 'but there's not the least danger of Mrs. Verney having secret meetings with any gentleman; she's far too good to have anything of the sort. It's a shame to suspect such an angel, and you know right well she's never given you any ground to do so.'

"I wonder he wasn't offended at my plain speaking, but, somehow, he didn't seem to be. You see I suited in other ways, and so I dare say he thought it better not to part with me; and my being so averse to turn spy showed him I was faithful and upright, and not likely, if his wife were really doing anything wrong, to be a party to it, or conceal it from him.

"One day, when Mr. Verney was out, a letter came for my mistress, and I took it to her. A few minutes after, Mr. Verney came in, and went straight into the room where she was. Passing a little while after, I heard his

voice loud and excited, and she crying. That evening, he came to me and told me to pack up my mistress' things, that we were to start early the next morning for Ireland. I, of course, couldn't guess at all what was the cause of this sudden change of plans. I knew that he hadn't had any intention the day before, of going to Ireland, for I had heard him speaking to Mrs. Verney as if he intended remaining at Brighton for some time.

"The next morning, we set out at six o'clock. My mistress looked very sorrowful, and her sweet blue eyes were red and swollen, as if she'd been crying all night. During the journey Mr. Verney watched her, one might say as a cat watches a mouse that it has under its paw. He never left her side for a minute. The journey was performed with as few stoppages as possible. When we got to

Dublin, we drove direct to the railway, and started by the first train. There was only half-an-hour to wait for it, but Mr. Verney was impatient even at that slight delay.

"By the time we got to the end of the long railway journey, my mistress was thoroughly wearied out, and the hour was late. Yet, instead of stopping for the night at the hotel, Mr. Verney ordered horses to be got ready, and cruelly insisted on her going on at once to Verney Court.

"A cold, drizzling rain was falling, but no close carriage was to be had, and we were obliged to go in an open one. I wrapt up Mrs. Verney in shawls, as well as I could, but there was a bitter wind, which, though not high, pierced through all mufflings, and seemed to strike direct to one's heart.

"When we entered the avenue, thickly strewn with leaves—for all the trees had not

been cut down then—and the ponderous gate closed on us with a bang, I saw a tremor pass over my mistress's frame. It seemed like entering a prison.

"The house was in total darkness. No one was expecting us, for Mr. Verney had been in too great a hurry setting out, to write and let the old woman who had charge of the house know we were coming. Mr. Verney had to knock six or seven times before any one came to open the door. In answer to his last thundering summons, the bolts were tremblingly withdrawn, and the old woman appeared.

"She didn't seem in the least surprised at seeing who were waiting for admittance. The fact is, she was too old and stupid to be surprised at anything, however surprising. When Mr. Verney swore at her for keeping us waiting so long, she only mumbled inarticulately.

She was quite deaf, and didn't know what he was saying, nor had she heard the knocks till the last one.

"We went into the dining-room. There was no fire, and the air was damp and heavy. It felt like a place that hadn't been inhabited for years, which, indeed, was the fact; for this was the first time Mr. Verney had come to it since it fell into his hands. It had been in his family for ever so long. Some of his Spanish ancestors built it ages ago. There used to be a drawbridge, I hear.

"The big room, besides being cold as a vault, was as dark, and the sputtering half-penny candle stuck in a broken bottle—which the old woman held in her hand when she opened the door, and had now placed on the table—gave only enough light to show the darkness.

"It was a nice, cheerful place for a young

wife to come home to, and a warm welcome for her to get! Poor Mrs. Verney felt it. She looked all round the room with a pitiful expression on her beautiful face; and then her features began to work convulsively. I saw that she tried hard to control herself, but she hadn't the power to do it. She was weak with fatigue, and I may say starvation, for Mr. Verney hadn't waited to get any refreshment for her at the hotel, and she'd only taken a glass of water in the middle of the day.

"After a few efforts to command herself, she burst into a fit of hysterical crying. It wasn't so much the actual hardships she had gone through, and the miserable look of the place she minded, I know, as the idea of the whole thing. I laid her on the sofa—the same big leather one that's still in the spot it was then—and tried to soothe her.

"When she'd got a bit quieter, I groped my way down to the kitchen, and, after a great deal of roaring, got the old woman to understand that I wanted her to kindle some turf to light fires upstairs, and to put some water to boil. But she hadn't a bit of sense, and the end of it was that I had to turn about and light the fires and do everything myself. You may think how stupid she was, when I tell you she was going to throw a can full of water over the only fire in the house, when I seized her arm.

"'Sure, didn't ye tell me to put wather on the fire?' says she.

"'I told you to put on the kettle, you fool!' I cried. And then she went, and was actually going to put on the kettle without a drop in it. I just took it from her without a word, and sent her off to bed. She was more a hindrance than a help to me.

"When at last I got the fires lighted, matters weren't mended. The chimneys wouldn't draw, so that the rooms were filled with smoke, and I had to open the windows to let it out. If you'd wanted to paint a picture of discomfort, that room would have been just the model for it, with the butt of tallow candle swaying in the wind from the window, the fire just beginning to kindle, and the air dense with clouds of smoke. Not a thing could be got right that night. The cup of tea I made for my mistress, in hopes to revive her, had a queer sort of taste, as if the water 'd been boiled in a rusty vessel.

"The next day, I got things into some sort of order, and Mr. Verney gave me permission to hire two of the country girls as servants. They'd never been in places before, and had no idea of work. I had my own bother teaching them.

"For some time, Mr. Verney kept such a close watch over his wife that I was never left alone with her for more than a few minutes together. But after a couple of months or so, he began to get tired of the monotony and dreariness of his life, and began to go away to London and Dublin occasionally, but never by any chance took her with him.

"Sometimes, he would remain away a long time, sometimes, a very short time. He was uncertain as the wind. But, long or short, he was always sure at last to return suddenly, and at a time when he was least expected. Sometimes he wrote to say he was coming, and mentioned a particular day and hour; but, whenever he did this, he was always sure to come a day or two before the one arranged, or else not till long after.

"He had a passion for gambling. When we were at Brighton he often spent the whole night out gambling. He—what's that?"

The chair placed against the door was being moved almost imperceptibly into the room, and a slight scraping noise had occurred.

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Baker, in a louder tone, "they thought at first it was the measles. Little Patsy was the worst with it, and one night his throat was so bad that they were quite alarmed, and sent off in a fright for Dr. O'Hanlon. He pronounced it scarlatina, and said—"

"What o'clock are ye here?" asked old Donal's voice at the door. "Quarther afther ten; yis, ye're about right. Herself outside's ha'-past. It's the fast lady entirely she's gettin', bedad. But don't ye go for to

crow, me fine madam; sure it's worser ye used to be yerself whin ye was out there in the dhraught. I haven't forgotten the thricks ye used to be goin' on wid, by gor. Sure it's on'y sense ye got into these warm quarthers yiv behaved yerself any way dacent at all. Ye're fond o' the hate, ye lazy huzzy! But now that I look at ye betther, seems to me one o' yer hands crooked. D'ye obsarve it?" said he, with a wag of his head towards Mrs. Baker and me.

"I don't see anything wrong with the clock," replied Mrs. Baker.

"Bedad, but there is, though; one iv her hands isn't pointin' straight. Anyone wid eyes in their head 'ud see it," returned Donal, dogmatically. "I'll jest bring in the table an' git up to her. Sure it's worritted entirely meself is wid 'em for clocks."

He went away, leaving the door open be-

hind him, and after a few minutes returned, dragging in a wooden table from the kitchen, which he mounted, and began to root at the clock, meanwhile lavishing on it every term of abuse and contempt which the vocabulary of the English and Irish languages afforded. The task seemed endless.

Mrs. Baker continued her impromptu story about the children who were at first thought to have measles.

"It remains now to be seen whether she'll sthrike or not," said old Donal, at last leaving off rooting, and cautiously stepping from the table to the chair, and thence to the floor.

"Jest mind, will ye, whin she sthrikes next, if she gives the proper number o' sthrikes? She does get sulky, sometimes, afther I've been at her, an' eayther won't say a word at all at all, or not as many as she has the right.

So jest ye'll recken whin ye hear her begin, an' let me know if she's afther goin' on wid any iv her thricks, an' I'll bile her to-morrow, by gor!"

When old Donal had gone, Mrs. Baker once more placed the chair against the door, and resumed—

"Well, during one of his absences, Mrs. Verney made a confidant of me, and told me all her sad little story. She had been beneath Mr. Verney in position. Her family were in the theatrical line, and she had been brought up as an actress. She was engaged to be married to a gentleman of high family, a Mr. Graydon, whom she loved, and Mr. Verney induced her to believe him false, told her he was going to marry another, and brought forward what appeared to be such indisputable proofs of it, that she never

doubted the truth of what he said. After a little while, he asked her to be his wife. She refused, saying she didn't intend to marry. But he was not to be so repulsed. He was resolved that she should be his wife, and her will was nothing against his.

"Every fresh difficulty seemed only to increase his passion, and make him more determined to attain his object. It was like the excitement of gambling. I believe that if he could have got her easily, he'd never have cared for her at all.

"He continued his attentions to her under the guise of a friend, and made himself useful to her in many ways. He shielded her from the insults and impertinences which one so young and beautiful would be likely to meet with in her position, if unprotected. At the end of five years, he again urged his offer

upon her, and she, unable to hold out against him, and being alone and desolate, consented to be his wife.

"The letter she received the day of Mr. Verney's sudden decision to quit Brighton, was from a friend of Mr. Graydon, and explained the true state of the case, which had just then come to his knowledge. Mr. Graydon had been deceived, and led to believe her false—as she had him—by Mr. Verney, and, indignant at her supposed fickleness, had been drawn into a marriage with a young lady his parents designed for him.

"She was just reading the letter when Mr. Verney came in. She didn't hear him, she was so absorbed in it, till he was almost beside her. Then she tried to hide it, but too late, he had seen it, and, fixing his eyes on her, he commanded her to deliver it up to him at once, and she obeyed without a word.

The contents of the letter roused Mr. Verney's jealousy and suspicion to that degree, that he couldn't rest a minute till he'd got her to a place of security.

"He'd have taken her off that night if he could. He was so full of schemes and devices himself that he thought she must be the same, and seemed to think she'd run away with somebody if he gave her the opportunity. He couldn't understand at all that she'd think it her duty to be true to him, no matter how bad he was, or by what unprincipled means he'd induced her to be his wife, now that she was so.

"Well, one day, soon after—after—after-r-r—soon after little Patsy began to get a great deal better, though he didn't recover so quick as the other children, and was delicate for a long time. When his father—"

"By gor! it's a quare thing to kape the

doure barred up in sich a way," growled Donal's voice, indignantly, as he pushed in the chair. "One 'ud think yiz was plottin' trayson, an' was afeard o' bein' overheard, wid a chair agin it! Phew!"

"Well, sure you know the door won't stay close without something against it," said Mrs. Baker, "and when it's ajar, such a draught comes in that I declare I get the toothache, sitting in it."

"Oh, ay! to be sure. Well, did she sthrike right?"

"What?"

"Why, she beyant, herself, in coorse, the clock. Now d'ye understand?" returned Donal, testily.

"Oh! I really didn't mind," replied Mrs. Baker.

"Ye didn't recken! Well! Well! sich a thing, an' you sittin' there wid yer two hands

afore ye. Oh, Moses! did ye ever hear the like o' that? But, sure, it was too much tuck up ye was wid that story about them sick children to be afther mindin' anythin' else, an' I suppose miss beyant was jest the same."

"I think it struck ten," I said, venturing a guess, in hope to allay Donal's suspicions, which were evidently aroused.

"Ye think! an' I wondher what's the good o' ye thinkin' whin ye're not sure." growled Donal. "I wasn't axin' ye yer thoughts, an' I don't want to hear 'em. Did ye recken? that's what I want to come at. No, I see ye didn't. Ye're good for nothin' but listenin' to scandal an' lies. Ye're jest a faymale, that's what ye are, bedad!" and he shambled out of the room in a rage. I couldn't help laughing.

"You see he suspects," said Mrs. Baker,

you had better not stay here any longer now. I think he will have business out to-morrow, and then I can finish. Good night."

As I passed the kitchen, I saw Donal peering out from behind the door, as if meditating a third irruption into the housekeeper's room.

CHAPTER II.

"Stay for me there! I will not fail
To meet thee in that hollow vale."

THE next day, Donal being out collecting rents, Mrs. Baker continued the story of Catherine's mother.

"One evening, nearly a year after we'd come to Verney Court, Mrs. Verney and I were out walking. Mr. Verney had gone away the day before, so it wasn't likely he'd be back for a week at least, though, of course, there was no knowing.

"We were walking along rather slowly, my mistress leaning on my arm, for she wasn't strong, when we heard a step behind us—a step too light to be that of a

countryman with his heavy clogs. It was like the step of a gentleman. I felt my mistress' hand tremble as it lay on my arm. I thought she fancied it was Mr. Verney come back, and wondered, for she was always uncommon sharp at knowing his step—and knock, too—and this wasn't like it at all.

"I turned round my head a little, and saw a tall, fair, nice-looking gentleman, with aristocratic features, and frank, open countenance, but deeply shadowed with melancholy.

"When he came close behind us, and was about to pass, Mrs. Verney turned, and looked up into his face. Then, with a cry of 'Charles! Charles!'—it was a cry, though uttered under her breath—she would have sunk to the ground if I had not supported her.

"The blood rushed into the gentleman's face, then fled, leaving him pale as marble.

He looked at her with an expression I can't describe—I'm quick enough at seeing expressions, but not at describing them.

"'Is it possible I see Mrs. Verney? this is indeed a surprise,' he said, at last, trying to appear composed, and speak in an ordinary tone. 'I believe the surprise is mutual. I thought you were in England, and you probably thought I was there.'

"'Oh! Charles, why have you come here?' she cried, passionately. 'It is six years since I saw your face, and I thought never to see it again till we met in Heaven. O God! I was miserable enough, but now to see him, and to know that there is a gulf between us—that we are parted—'

"She stopped, and seemed about to burst out crying, but her eyes remained dry, and no tears came to her relief.

"'Are you, too, then, miserable, Cathe-

rine?' said Mr. Graydon, for, of course, I guessed it was he. 'Has your life been a burden and a weariness to you all these years since your marriage? and has the sting of remorse been added—'

"'All these years!' she interrupted, then added with a sad smile, 'Yes, truly, though I am married but one year, it has been like many to me.'

"'One year!' cried Mr. Graydon. 'It is six since I heard of your preference for—for Mr. Verney, and you were married to him a month after.'

"No, no! Not for five years after."

"'Then I was deceived on that point,' murmured Mr. Graydon.

"'And I wouldn't have married him then, only I was alone and homeless, and I believed you false. If I'd known that you had been

deceived, as I was—if that letter had come a few months sooner—'

"'What letter?'

"'The letter explaining how a person had been employed to tell you a false story about me. You might have had more faith in me than to believe it,' she added sorrowfully.

"'Then the tale of your preference for Mr. Verney was invented by himself,' said Mr. Graydon in a low deep voice, 'and I, believing it—madman that I was—played into his hands; hopeless, and indifferent to my fate, allowed myself to be led into a marriage of convenience, and he went and told you I was false, having first made me so by the lying story of *your* falsity. O God! the deep-dyed, treacherous scoundrel! The curse of Heaven light upon him.'

"'He is my husband now,' said my mistress.

"'It is for that I curse him,' went on Mr. Graydon, passionately. 'You were pledged to me, and he tore you almost from my arms. He has no right to be your husband. Just Heaven, what a mass of treachery we've both been the victims of, what a wreck that man—devil I might rather say—has made of our happiness! But, oh, my poor Catherine, restless and wretched as I am, I fear yours is a worse fate; here in this lonely place, his wife, with nothing to divert your mind for a minute from the past and the dreary present. Is he kind to you?'

"'He gives me presents, but he leaves me here alone, when he goes away himself, and I am afraid of him,' she answered.

"'Are you really very unhappy?' he asked.

"'Miserable,' she murmured.

"'Great God! What should I do?' he

exclaimed, striking his forehead, 'I cannot bear this.'

"'It is Heaven's will, we must submit,' she said, 'It won't last long. Our paths on earth lie different ways, but we shall meet there'—she pointed to the sky, golden and red with the setting sun—'when it will be no wrong to any one to love each other, which it is now, bound as we are. Don't let us cheat ourselves of that happiness, Charles, by indulging in angry feelings, and repining. Think of the joy it will be to meet there, where no cruel hand can part us more. What is the misery even of a long life, out of an eternity of happiness?'

"Her words, spoken slowly, and in a peculiarly sweet, sad voice, had calmed Mr. Graydon's passion. His hand was over his face, and the tears were trickling through his fingers.

"'Don't grieve for me,' she continued, 'I shall soon be in that haven where the weary are at rest, and though I hope you may live many years and be happy, it won't seem long to me till you, too, come there. Don't neglect your wife, Charles, that would be wrong. She loves you, of course.'

"'As much as I love her,' answered Mr. Graydon, bitterly, dashing the tears from his eyes, 'I married her to please my family, and she married me to please hers. It was a marriage of convenience, as I said, a union of estates, not of hearts. Her whole soul is in balls and gaieties of all sorts.'

"'But you have a boy, you must love him, he is a comfort to you.'

"'He is like his mother.'

"She was silent for a while, and Mr. Graydon again passed his hand across his eyes. At last she said—

"'We must part. It is time this interview came to an end. The only thing we can do is to pray for each other, that we may be enabled to bear the cross it has pleased Heaven to lay upon us, and to fulfil our duties while we live, and forgive those who have injured us. Perhaps we shall enjoy the happiness of Heaven more, because we have had so little here,' she said with a faint smile that was truly angelic.

"'Now let us say farewell. But wait a minute—the ring you gave me, I should return it.'

"'No, no, keep it.'

"'I have no right to keep it, and, besides, it is not safe; my husband might find it any time, and he knows it was your gift. He often saw it on my finger long ago. Wait here while I go back to the house for it.'

"She moved away, and I went after her.

I had stood aside during their conversation, but had heard all they said; the stillness of the lonely spot was so great, and though so many years have passed since, I still remember every word almost as it was spoken. When we came back, Mr. Graydon was walking up and down. She gave him the ring, saying—

"'When you look at it, Charles, let it remind you that our trysting place is Heaven. You never broke an appointment with me, see that you don't break this one. I shall be waiting for you. Good-bye!"

"He took her hand. 'My saint! My pure angel! I will not break this appointment, so help me God. Perhaps it is I who will be waiting for you.' He stooped, and was going to kiss the poor little hand he held, when a sudden rustling was heard, and, like

a flash of lightning, a figure sprang across the hedge that divided the place where they stood, from the road, and struck down my mistress's hand before his lips touched it, with a blow that I wonder didn't break her wrist. It was Mr. Verney.

"'Scoundrel! sneak! dog!' he shouted, facing Mr. Graydon, his eyes seeming to shoot out sparks of fire, and then he poured forth a volley of oaths and curses so awful that they will be imprinted on my memory to my dying day. 'So then this is how you amuse yourself while I am away!' he exclaimed in a tone of bitter sarcasm, turning to Mrs. Verney, who stood pale and still as a statue. 'This is the loneliness you complained of. His pure angel, I heard him call you, as if you could be his, and yet pure. Vile woman! I've found you out. You were

an actress, one of a class not to be trusted, and you carried your acting into private life. *Pure!* You are as pure as—'

"'As the snow when it first falls from heaven,' interrupted Mr. Graydon, 'you are under a mistake. I swear to you this meeting was accidental.'

"'Accidental! Do you think I'm a fool? Coward! mean sneak! such excuses won't avail. You are a liar, a perjured liar!'

"This was too much. Mr. Graydon could command himself no longer, and a fearful scene of reproach and recrimination ensued, in the middle of which my unfortunate mistress swooned away, and I carried her to the house, leaving them alone. The sun had sunk behind the mountains some time before, and it was then quite dusk.

"When my mistress recovered from the swoon, she became very ill, and, that she

might be out of Mr. Verney's way, I brought her to the turret chamber over the picture gallery in the western wing. It's quite ruined now, and the stairs are broken away, as you may have seen, but it wasn't so bad then, and I made it as comfortable as I could for her. That night, Miss Catherine was born. It was a fearful stormy night, I remember, though the evening had been so calm and lovely.

"It was near midnight when Mr. Verney returned, and he was accompanied by old Donal, whom nobody had ever seen in these parts before.

"The next day, when I told Mr. Verney of the birth of his child, he swore, with a terrible oath, that he would never own it as his, and that, as soon as Mrs. Verney was well, she and it should leave the house. And he gave me notice to quit, for having been a party to

his wife's disgraceful intrigue, he said. I tried to explain that the meeting he had surprised was the first, and altogether accidental, but he wouldn't listen to me, and got into such a rage that I was afraid to stay in the room.

"For some time, my mistress continued very ill; fever came on, and she was delirious. I was so taken up with her that I never thought about Mr. Graydon at all, whether he'd left the neighbourhood or not, till one day, the third from that evening, and the birth of the child, I think it was, I had gone down to the kitchen for something, and one of the girls said to me, 'Wisha! that was an awful accident entirely happened to the thrain; thirteen people killed dead, and ever so many desthroyed for life.'

"'Oh, dear!' I said.

"The girl had the paper in her hand, and

began reading out the names of the killed. I didn't half mind her, for I was thinking of my poor mistress, till she read, 'Charles Percival Graydon.' I thought my ears had deceived me.

"'Graydon, did you say?' I cried.

"'Yes,' and she read the name again, 'Charles Percival Graydon.'

"'Good God!' I exclaimed, and snatched the paper from her.

"Yes, there it was in black and white. It was an awful shock to me. I felt quite stunned. It was hard to realise that the handsome, graceful young man I had seen full of life and feeling but three days before was now a crushed and mangled corpse. He was first at the trysting place, and perhaps she wouldn't keep him waiting long for her, I thought.

"When I went upstairs, I couldn't help

crying as I sat beside my mistress and heard her ravings about the time when she and Mr. Graydon were happy. She seemed to be going over scenes that had passed between them, and a faint smile and blush would pass over her pale face, as if she were listening to lover's words.

"But her ravings weren't always of this sort. They were often frightful to hear, and she required restraint. Sometimes when she'd been lying quiet for a little while, and I thought her asleep, she would start up with a look of agony and terror on her face, shrieking out, 'Oh, don't kill him! don't, don't, for the love of Heaven! Kill me! O God! there's a fiend clinging to him. I see the eyes, no, there are no eyes, only two burning coals!' Then she would sink back, covering her face with her hands, and shuddering. Her ravings appeared to disturb

the poor infant. It moaned continually as it lay on her bosom, and seemed to look into her face with eyes full of understanding.

"When at last the fever left her, reason didn't return. The chief feature of her malady was fear of her husband. At his voice or step, she would cower in corners. He was impatient for her to be fit to leave the house, and often inquired about her. He seemed to think that I made her out worse than she really was, in order to put off that time.

"One day, just as I was coming out of Mrs. Verney's room, I heard the oaken door at the end of the gallery open, and, to my horror and dismay, saw Mr. Verney enter. I ran forward as quick as I could, and, stretching out my two arms to bar the way to her room, asked him what he wanted. He replied in a tone of cool determination, that he wished to

judge for himself of his wife's state. I told him it was impossible, that the sight of him might kill her. But he repeated that he was resolved to see her, cost what it might, and if I opposed him longer, he would force his way to her room.

"'At least,' I said, 'let me go to prepare her.' He consented, and I went.

"Just as I took the handle in my hand and was turning it, I heard the sudden clap of a door, a crash, a cry, and a sound like a heavy fall. I rushed in, followed by Mr. Verney. The room was empty. No sign either of Mrs. Verney or the child. We looked around in bewilderment. I had certainly heard the clap of a door, yet the room communicated with no other. Having searched all over the room and clearly ascertained that she was not concealed in it, Mr. Verney began to sound the walls and floor. At last he exclaimed, after

a close examination of one particular spot, 'Yes, there is certainly a trap-door here,' and pressing his foot hard on the boards near the wall, they gave way, and a trap door flew open. He stooped eagerly over, but, at the first glance below, started back with ashy, horror-stricken face, as if his eyes had met some sight of terror. 'What is it?' I cried. He made no answer. I rushed forward and looked down, but only to start back as instantly as he had done, unable to articulate a word, and with the blood frozen at my heart.

"The trap-door opened into a secret closet in the ceiling of the picture gallery below, but the boards were broken away, and my eyes had looked straight down into the room, and lighted on the figure of my mistress, lying crushed and bleeding on the stone floor.

"I was nearly fainting, but suddenly the

idea occurred to me that she might not be dead, and with trembling limbs that could hardly support me, I ran down. Mr. Verney came, too.

"I raised my mistress's head, and laid it on my bosom. Her golden hair and white dress were stained with blood. She was not quite dead, but in a few minutes breathed her last. Oh, my poor mistress! my sweet, innocent, injured saint! what a death to die."

Mrs. Baker paused, and was unable to proceed for some time. At last she went on—

"The baby, which had been in her arms, escaped unhurt by falling on a heap of soft rubbish.

"Not a creature had known of the existence of the closet. It had probably been used as a hiding place in times of trouble. Mrs. Verney must have discovered it some

time before, and when I opened the door, thinking it was her husband, whose voice she must have heard in the corridor, flew to it to hide from him, and the decayed flooring, unable to sustain even her slight weight, gave way.

"Mr. Verney stood by and watched her die, with stony eyes. When she was dead, he left the room and shut himself into his study, where he remained for days. It would be impossible to guess what he passed through during that time. But when he came out, his hair was grey, his figure bowed, as you now see it, like that of a man of seventy. He had passionately loved his wife; but, knowing the deception he had practised, was always jealous and suspicious, and ready to believe she had wronged him.

"He didn't attend her funeral. The solitary hearse left the house unattended by a

single mourner. To see it, you'd never have thought that it contained the remains of one so young and beautiful and good. But maybe, for all that, she had more true mourners than many a one who has carriages full, for all the country people round loved her; she was never without a gentle word and smile for them.

"No stone marks the spot where she lies; but I planted snowdrops over it, as emblems of her purity, and it seems to me that they always spring up soonest there, and that the grass grows fresher and greener on that lonely grave than any other."

She paused for a few minutes, then continued—

"The day after the funeral, when Mr. Verney came out of his room, and I saw the dreadful change that had taken place in his

appearance, I thought it was the result of bitter remorse for the wrong he had done his innocent wife, and hoped it would have a softening and purifying effect on his character. But the reverse seemed to be the case. Harsh and tyrannical as he had always been, he then became doubly so. The agony which in a few days had turned his jet black hair grey, and bent his strong frame, could not have been repentance, for though he did not insist on my leaving, but on the contrary, rather seemed to wish me to remain, he never softened to his child, or treated her as his daughter.

"The old man, Donal, seemed to have an evil influence over him. I don't know why he took to this man. He seemed bound to him."

"But how do you account for Donal's re-

cognition of the ring on Catherine's finger?" I asked. "He could never have seen it before, yet his looks, even more than Mr. Verney's, expressed the extremest horror and perplexity, fear even, at sight of it."

"That's what puzzles me. Everything about that old Donal, from the night he first came to this house up to the present time, is a mystery. He seems connected in some extraordinary way with matters which one would think he could have no concern in, and appears to know of things that it would be impossible to account for his knowing. I cannot divest my mind of the idea that there is some mystery about the whole affair, which remains to be cleared up.

"Well, now you have heard the sad story of Catherine's mother. You know the secret of the crimson stains on the floor of the picture gallery, and of the mark in the ceil-

ing. It was plastered over very soon after my mistress's death; but the traces of the door still remain. The turret chamber was shut up, and everything connected with Mrs. Verney put away. Her picture, which had hung in the dining-room, was thrown into the gallery by old Donal, and left lying on its face on the floor. I picked it up, and hung it on the wall, where it still is."

CHAPTER III.

GONE.

THE next morning was the third since Catherine's imprisonment. No one had been allowed access to her but old Donal, who brought her meals. I had not expected that she would have held out beyond the first day, especially as I knew that she did not love Mr. Percival—or Mr. Graydon—as I should now call him.

But Mr. Verney had adopted the least likely mode of making her submit to his wishes, when he tried force, for opposition always had the effect of strengthening Cathe-

rine's will; besides, she would consider yielding on this point equivalent to admitting the charge against her mother, and Catherine's veneration for her mother's memory was one of the strongest and best points of her character.

Mrs. Baker and I had now become seriously uneasy about Catherine. Who could tell what effect this enforced confinement might not have upon her? I thought of her continually, and often wondered how she passed the time. Was she sunk in one of her fits of gloom, or chafing restlessly against her imprisonment?

On this third morning, as Mr. Verney and I were seated socially at breakfast, the door was suddenly thrown open in a violent manner, and old Donal tumbled into the room. He appeared to be in a state of great excitement. His grey hair was tossed in wild

confusion over his face, which was almost purple.

"Oh, murther! murther!" he cried, wringing his hands. "Oh, wirra! wirra! what'll I do at all? Bad loock to it for a mornin'. Oh, murther! murther!"

"What has happened?" cried Mr. Verney, starting up and throwing the newspaper he had been reading, to the other side of the room. "Can't you speak out, you infernal, drivelling old idiot?"

"Och, sure it's kill me dead ye will if I do. Oh, murther, the young schamer! It's none o' my fault, I declare to ye, be all the powers. Afther I cum out o' the room I locked it. It was jest afther strikin' ten as I wint down, lasteways she intinded it for ten, though it was twenty-two she sthruck, the cussed thunderin' ould hypo—hypo—hypochondriac!"

"Who cares what the hour was!" interrupted Mr. Verney, furiously. "You came here to tell something; come to the point this instant. What is it?"

"Oh, murther! She's gone, escaped clane an' clever."

"Escaped! Who? Do you mean Catherine?" exclaimed Mr. Verney, rage and alarm in his tone.

"Och! yis, I do, iv coorse its her I'm manin', sure, didn't I say so? She's gone off wid that chap. The tree undher her windee's bent. She must ha' got down be it, an' over the broken wall. If they warn't in time for the six o'clock thrain, there's not another till ten, so they might, mebbe, be ketched yit, if we're quick about follyin' them. It's ha'-past eight now be her over the chimbley-piece, an' she's right."

"Then there is no time to be lost," cried

Mr. Verney. "Get horses saddled at once, don't lose an instant. They must be pursued."

Donal hastened away. While he was absent, Mr. Verney paced swiftly up and down the room, like a baffled wild animal traversing its den. In a few minutes, horses were at the door, and he started at a furious gallop. Shortly after, another pursuit, headed by old Donal, set off in the opposite direction, in case their plan should be to proceed further into the country, instead of to town.

Mrs. Baker was in great grief about Catherine's flight.

"It's not like as if she'd gone with some one I knew and could trust," she said, "but I have no faith in this young Mr. Graydon. Poor child! my heart misgives me; this will turn out a sad affair for her. Oh, dear; to think how happy she would have been as Mr.

Nugent's wife, and now all is uncertainty; it's impossible to say what her fate may be."

I shared Mrs. Baker's mistrust of Mr. Graydon, and was sincerely sorry for the step Catherine had taken. The young man's manner had, from the first, struck me as false. There was a sparkle in it which did not seem genuine. He was one in whom I would not repose the slightest confidence. How Catherine had contrived to communicate with him, closely watched as she had been, was a mystery, but she was fertile in expedients.

Mrs. Baker and I scarcely knew whether to hope or to fear that the pursuit would be unsuccessful. If they were overtaken, and Catherine brought back, her father would, no doubt, keep her in still stricter confinement than he had before done.

Mr. Verney was the first to return. He

was alone, and there was a heavy, black cloud on his countenance, which gave to his stern features a more than usually repellant expression.

He said not a word to any one, and Mrs. Baker did not dare to ask a single question. But we afterwards learned that the train had started before he arrived, and that he had heard no tidings whatever of Catherine, or obtained any clue by which to continue the pursuit after her.

Donal did not return till some hours later. He had been equally unsuccessful, and was in an exceedingly ill-humour, having been led a wild goose chase, he said, by some rumour he had heard.

The clocks were the chief sufferers from his bad temper. The moment he entered the house he roared out that they were all wrong,

and began to root at their insides in such a merciless manner, that not one of them went right for a week after.

The remainder of the day I could think of nothing but Catherine, and that night she troubled my dreams strangely; but by the morning, none of them had left any impression on my mind, except one, and that was of her mother, in which I fancied that one day, as I was passing the door of Catherine's room, it suddenly opened, and Mrs. Verney came out. I knew it was she, from her likeness to the picture in the gallery, and from the long, beautiful, golden hair of the same hue as Catherine's.

As I gazed in awe-struck silence, she raised her arms above her head, and uttered a low, melancholy cry, that had a stifled sound, as if it came through some thick

muffling. Then she turned and glided along the corridor towards the western wing, and I awoke, fancying that I still heard the cry ringing mournfully through the galleries. I was in that condition between sleeping and waking, when the phantasms the brain has conjured up in sleep still seem hovering around, and it requires a painful effort thoroughly to awaken to real life.

While in this state, I thought I heard the oak door leading to the ruined chamber, open. The sound, whether real or fancied, completely aroused me. I sat up in bed and listened, but all was silent save the moaning of the wind in the chimney and round the house. It might have been its whistling through the long corridors that I fancied to be a cry, and it might have caused the oak door to burst open.

The pursuit was not renewed next day. It would have been useless, as the fugitive was most likely beyond it by this time.

Henceforth, it became a crime, punishable by a terrible frown on Mr. Verney's face, to mention Catherine's name in his presence.

CHAPTER IV.

A DEATH-BED.

TIME passed on. The purple heather on moor and mountain had faded to a dull brown, the blossoms had dropped from the dry stalk, and been borne away by the wind, or melted to an undistinguishable mass by the rain. All the lingering glories of autumn were past. The winter had now fairly set in, and the spirit of desolation seemed to reign paramount over everything.

But the dreariness without was as nothing to that within Verney Court. Like an April

sunbeam, Catherine had illumined the weird, crumbling old mansion, and now she was gone.

Since her departure, we had heard nothing of her. She had not even sent a line to tell us where she was, and Mrs. Baker was very much fretted by this uncertainty about her.

A great change had of late taken place in Mr. Verney's manner towards me. He had become quite polite and gracious, condescended to talk to me at meal times on such subjects as are supposed to interest young ladies, and altogether seemed trying to make himself agreeable.

But his efforts were frightful and repulsive to me, and I would greatly have preferred that his indifference had continued. I distrusted his new manner, and could not help thinking that it was assumed for some purpose.

I determined that, as soon as I had learned what my real position was, I would leave Verney Court.

Mrs. Baker thought that the late mention of his wife had revived Mr. Verney's remorse, or grief, about her, for, very soon after Catherine's flight, he caused the ruined wing of the house to be blocked up, so as to have no communication with the other part.

Rumours began to be afloat among the country people, that the ghost of Mrs. Verney walked, on account of his cruelty to her daughter. Several declared positively that they had seen it.

One by one all the servants left. New ones were brought from town, but soon, they, too, quitted, declaring that if their wages were to be doubled they would not stay in a haunted house. It was useless to engage

others, so Mrs. Baker was obliged to do the work herself, with the assistance of a woman who came in for the day.

I sometimes fancied that I heard strange, unearthly noises, especially when walking up and down the gallery outside the barred-up oak door, which I had a habit of doing. My companion at such times was Catherine's dog, Brian Borohme, who was always prowling about the gallery. Cecil had given him to Catherine, and he had been much attached to her. Since her disappearance, he seemed to have taken a liking to me. He was a large, splendid, curly black animal, with almost the intelligence of a human being. I liked to have his company whenever I could. He would pace majestically up and down the gallery, beside me, but if any noise were heard, he would prick up his ears and run

forward to the door—indeed, he often did this when I could hear nothing—there he would crouch down, with his paws spread out before him, uttering dismal howls.

After dark, I never cared to stay in the gallery; indeed, if I had done so, and the news got about, I would not have been considered canny. But Brian Borohme remained there; no blandishments of mine could induce him to leave it and come with me to the oaken parlour, where I spent the long winter evenings alone. I dared not go to the housekeeper's room, for old Dònal was always watching, and would have tormented us by bursting in at every moment.

I used to think the evening would never come to an end. The large, weird parlour, with its ancient furniture, and corners, where the darkness seemed to take form, was

almost as ghostly-looking a place as the gallery.

I heaped turf on the fire in vain; the room would not look cheerful. I fancied that the carved chairs looked at me with significant looks; though cut in precisely the same manner, I thought each had a look peculiar to itself—a different expression, as it were.

Then the faces in the fire, and the shadows on the wall—but it is useless to recall these fancies, now. I would have been glad of a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Preston. Yes, though the former had lectured ever so hard on "the genius of Popery." But they had been away from home for the last few months.

I went out as often as the weather permitted. And so the winter passed slowly on.

One day, early in February, when return-

ing from a walk, I met Alley O'Reilly. It was a long time since I had seen her. She was walking along in a dejected, spiritless manner, with her head bent down. When I came near, I saw that she was crying. The baby was not in her arms. She did not appear to see me till I stopped her.

"I'm afraid you are in trouble, Alley," I said. "I hope Shane is well, and the baby."

"The baby is well, my lady, but Shane's not," she answered, in a low voice, scarcely looking up. "I've been to the Dispensary to get this for him." She held up a bottle. "But sure it won't do him any good. The doctor says he's afraid he'll never be betther. Och, what am I to do at all? I could have borne poverty an' misery, even the loss of my darlin' baby, so he was left wid me. Oh, miss, they tell me to be resigned, but how can I, how can I?"

And she burst into such a passion of tears, that for some time it was useless to attempt speaking to her.

When she had become calmer, I asked if Shane had been long ill.

"Och, miss, I b'lieve he has; but sure I didn't know it till he was brought home dyin' to me. It was a faver he got in that prison they took him to."

"Prison!" I exclaimed, in surprise. "Was Shane in prison?"

"It wasn't for any crime, my lady," said Alley, raising her head proudly. But some one accused him falsely of taking part in secret meetin's against the landlords, and he was four long months in that cruel prison. If it hadn't been that they knew he was dyin' I don't know how much longer they'd have kep' him. Oh, it was cruel an' unjust, for he had nothin' to do wid anything o' the

sort. But sure it was just done to get him out o' the way. I know well who done it, an' so do all the neighbours."

"Who, Alley?" I asked. "Who would wish to get Shane out of the way?"

"Maybe I'm wrong to tell you, miss, but it's Mr. Verney I mane."

"Mr. Verney! Alley, why should he do such a thing? What could his object be?"

"I don't know, miss," replied Alley, shaking her head; "but everybody knows he done it—he an' ould Donal Dhue war wantin' for some time to get Shane out of the place. At first they tried to do it by risin' the rint on us, thinkin' we wouldn't be able to pay, an' when they saw that wouldn't do, they got up this plan."

"I hope you are mistaken, Alley. I trust Mr. Verney was not the means of Shane being arrested. But I mustn't keep you

longer from him. Good-bye, I shall call to-morrow. Perhaps Shane may not be so very ill as you think. People in fever often seem worse than they really are."

Next morning I called. The door of the cottage was lying open. I entered, but there was no one in the outer room. I tapped at the door of the inner one, and fancying I heard a voice say, "come in," opened the door.

When the scene within met my eyes, I was about to close it again gently, but the priest, who stood at the foot of the bed, motioned me to enter, and I stood in the chamber of death, for such, at a glance, I saw that it was.

The dying man was supported in the arms of his young wife, his head rested on her bosom, his deathly white hand was clasped round her little brown one—once, his had been just as brown.

Oh, how changed he was from when I had last seen him! The thick, clustering masses of dark brown hair were pushed back from his pallid, damp forehead; his eyes, over which the death film was fast gathering, were alternately fixed upon the face of his wife, and the image of the dying Saviour, which the priest was holding up before him. Old Miles O'Reilly sat at the other side of the bed, his head bent down between his knees, rocking himself backwards and forwards, while he muttered, in Irish, exclamations of grief. No other sound but the solemn voice of the clergyman, as he repeated the prayers for the dying, broke the stillness of the poor chamber where the Angel of Death was hovering.

A placid expression had crept over the features of Shane. Gradually his eyes began

to close as if he were falling asleep; his hand unclasped itself from Alley's, and at last his head dropped from her bosom to the pillow, where it lay motionless.

Then, with a loud and piercing cry of agony, Alley flung herself on her knees beside the bed, seized the cold hand of her husband and chafed it within her own, covering it with kisses, while in every term of endearment, she called on him to open his eyes and give her one look more, to speak one more last, fond word ere he left her for ever.

Her passionate prayers seemed to have power to call back the dead. Shane opened his eyes, and looked at her with an expression of care and trouble on his face.

"My poor Alley," he murmured, "not two years my wife; it's hard to leave you, God knows, very hard." A tear stood in the

eye of the dying man. "Who will take care of you, mavourneen, when I'm gone?" he murmured.

"God will temper the wind to the shorn lamb," said the priest, solemnly, and again he held up the crucifix.

"Try not to give way so to your grief," he said gently, in an undertone to Alley. "He was dying quite peaceful when you brought him back."

Alley choked back her sobs by a powerful effort, for her husband's sake. He groped for her hand. When it was placed in his he faintly pressed it, murmuring a few fond words in Irish; then, turning from her, he fixed his gaze on the crucifix. Gradually the troubled look faded from his countenance; his eyes closed once more. All was over. The victim of wrong and falsehood lay cold

and still, with the death-smile on his face, and the second victim, his young wife, lay beside him, almost as lifeless.

> "Lay him down, his work is done,
> Vain for him is friend or foeman,
> Rise of moon, or set of sun,
> Hand of man, or kiss of woman."

CHAPTER V.

DONAL BECOMES CONSIDERATE.

As I walked home, with the sharp blast of approaching spring blowing in my face, my thoughts were very sad. Yet, perhaps, it was not so much for the early dead that I ought to have grieved, as for the living, the young wife, whose life henceforth must be a blank, all the colour and brightness gone out of it for ever.

Poor Alley! So the dying man had called her, tears dimming his eyes, not for himself, but for her. How suddenly and completely had the light of joy been quenched in that once happy, though humble home!

And whose was the hand that had extinguished it? Was it, indeed, Mr. Verney who had caused Shane's arrest, and thus his death?

The threats which I had myself heard old Donal use to Shane, gave colour to Alley's impression that it was so. Yet, what motive could he have for so doing? I thought of "The Man of the Wreck," and his mysterious ravings.

The persecution of the O'Reillys had begun from the time that Shane had taken this man under his roof. What mystery, deeper than any I had yet penetrated, still hung around Mr. Verney?

Gloom and dreariness seemed gathering thickly over everything. All who had given life to this place had left it. Cecil Nugent gone, Catherine gone, and now, the bright, vigorous, active Shane O'Reilly dead. I could hardly realise yet that he was so.

Gradually my thoughts wandered to my own immediate prospects. Truly, they were not very bright. The sunshine seemed to be fading from my life, as it had done from this gloomy February day, after a few faint gleams in the morning.

My birthday was now but three days distant, and then I had resolved to leave Verney Court; yet I felt half reluctant to do so, for it seemed as if then I would lose all chance of again seeing—but no matter, there was no one I had ever met at Verney Court that it would not be better I should never see again.

Rain had begun to descend, but I did not notice it till I heard a voice beside me, offering me the shelter of an umbrella. I turned, and saw the priest, Father O'Loughlin.

"Thank you, but I'm afraid I shall bring you out of your way," I said.

"No, I have a call to make in this direction. That was a sad scene we witnessed," said he, after a pause.

"Yes," I murmured.

"That poor thing, his wife, was just awaking to consciousness as I left."

"Is there any one with her?" I asked. "Perhaps I ought to have stayed. I will go back."

"No, my dear, there is no occasion, some of the neighbours have come in, and she is well attended to. Poor girl! She has experienced a terrible loss. There is something peculiarly sad and painful in such a death as this, especially when one knows what was the cause of it. I can't think why O'Reilly was arrested. Everybody says it was the work of an enemy, and it certainly looks like it. Yet Shane O'Reilly was not a man to make enemies. Some one, who for reasons

of his own wished to get him out of the way, took advantage of those secret meetings that were going on here, to accuse him of having taken part in them. But I know, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that he was in no way concerned in them, though aware of their existence. I may tell you now, that he it was who wrote, through me, letters warning Mr. Nugent of the presence of some person who was endeavouring to corrupt his tenantry. Poor Shane! What a brave, noble fellow he was. You remember the night of the shipwreck last spring, how fearlessly he risked his life to save others. I little thought then that I should live to lay him in the grave," and the good man sighed, and brushed away a tear. "So young, only four-and-twenty, and just beginning life."

On arriving home, as I stood at the kitchen

fire, drying my cloak, old Donal came and stood beside me.

"So Shane O'Reilly's dead," he said, in what seemed to me a tone of exultation.

I made no reply.

"Is that thrue?"

"Yes," I replied, shortly, and taking the cloak on my arm, was about to leave the kitchen when he said abruptly—

"What makes ye be so fond iv always walkin' in that ould corridor?"

"I suppose I'm free to walk there if I choose," I replied.

"Oh, ay, to be sure, but aren't ye afeared o' the ghosts? Ye're mighty near to 'em whin ye're there, bedad. I seen somethin' very quare myself in that same corridor t'other day. I'm not goin' to scare ye out o'yer wits be describin' it, but it was a mortial

awful appearance, somethin' not o' this airth, an' I wouldn't like ye to see the likes iv it. Do ye niver be hearin' any quare noises whin ye're there, moans, or the like o' that?"

"I have heard strange noises," I replied.

"Well, an' don't ye know them's the ghosts?"

"I don't believe in ghosts."

"Thin how d'ye account for the noises ye do be hearin'?" he asked, sharply—

"I can't account for them," I returned.

"They're aisily enough accounted for thin, sure its haunted the house is, an' no mistake. There's a whole lot o' thim ghosts behind that oak doure I'm thinkin', an' what 'ud ye say if they was to march out on ye some day wid their skulls in their hands? they're apt to be dangerous whin they comes acrass a mortial, so if ye're sinsible, as I think ye are, though ye always do forgit to recken

whin the clocks sthrike, ye'll just take the advice iv a frind, that knows about such things, an' kape away from that side o' the house altogether. An' I'll tell ye what I'll do for ye, yer bedroom's too near that corridor; why it's on the very next one to it, an' is, besides, the only inhabited room there. I'll git a room done up nice for ye on the same floure as Mrs. Baker has hers; there ye'll be much comfortabler an' quite safe from the sperits. Sure even if any iv them war to come ye'd have nothin' to do but jest screech to Mrs. Baker, while in that other room ye might be kilt dead be them, an' niver a sowl be the wiser till mornin'. Eh, will that suit ye? Ye see I've some consideration for ye. Ould Donal Dhue's not as bad as he's painted."

"My present room suits me very well; I have no wish to change," I replied.

"What! Not though yiv ghosts next doure t' ye, as one may say."

"I told you I don't believe in ghosts."

"Still I'd advise ye to think agin afore ye make up yer mind. Any way, it'd be company like for ye to be near Mrs. Baker, I'll git the room ready, at all events, an' mebbe whin ye see it, ye'll be afther takin' a fancy to the looks iv it."

"I repeat that I don't wish to change my room," I said.

"Don't, thin, ye stubborn minx! May the divil fly away wid ye!" and he slammed out of the kitchen in a tremendous rage.

A few minutes after, I heard him go up to the corridor, and then I heard his voice, loud and angry, as if he were scolding somebody. He had evidently found the dog there, and was trying to hunt him away, Brian Borohme had, of late, been subjected to

Donal's vigilance, as well as Mrs. Baker and me. He seemed to have taken an extraordinary spite against the animal, and was always hunting him from his favourite lurking place in the gallery.

"Git out, ye brute, git out," I heard him shout in threatening tones, and then followed the sound of a stick. I instantly ran upstairs. Brian Borohme was crouching in the corner beside the oaken door, his eyes like balls of fire. Though Donal was beating him cruelly, he would not stir an inch, but kept up a low, fierce growling.

"You must not beat the dog," I cried, trying to hold the stick. "He's doing no harm here."

"Mustn't I?" returned he, sneeringly, "an' who siz so? I b'lieve ye think it's the misthress o' Verney Court ye are, an' sure if ye war that same, bedad it's not a bit more

ould Donal 'ud be yer sarvant than he is this minnit. Mustn't! begor, it's Donal could must the whole o' yiz. Wait a bit, me lady, mebbe I'll have ye undher me thumb as humble as ye plase some o' these days, whin ye're thinkin' ye're goin' the ways to have me undher yers. Faith, thin, if I don't take yer airs down a peg; ha, ha! Donal the Demon 'll manage yiz," and the hideous old man laughed mockingly.

I could make no reply to this speech, not comprehending it, so I repeated—

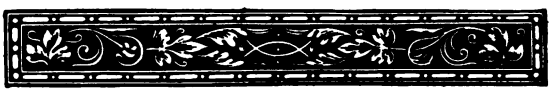
"You must not beat the dog, you shall not," and I placed myself before the animal, so that Donal could not reach him without first using violence to me.

"Confound ye!" he muttered, "but sure there's no use bating him, it's my belief he wouldn't come out o' that corner if I war to pound him to a jelly, he's jest as obstinate as

yerself, but I'll find some manes to git him out iv it for good an' all afore long," he added, as he left the gallery with an expression of countenance worthy of his name, Donal the Demon.

When he had gone, Brian Borohme ceased his growling, and, after a few minutes, came out of the corner, and stood on his hind legs to lick my hand, while he looked up at me with an expression which plainly said, "I know that that old man is your enemy as well as mine, and so we ought to be firmer friends on that account."

I stroked his head, and so the compact was sealed.



CHAPTER VI.

MY BIRTHDAY.

It was the morning of my birthday. I rose early, because I wished to have time for a walk before breakfast, that I might consider in what way I should open the subject of my position to Mr. Verney, and I could always think better when in the open air, than in the house.

To speak to Mr. Verney on this subject was a task I dreaded, but, nevertheless, it was a task which must be got through.

As I walked along, my thoughts were sad enough, they were always so now. I had

come to Verney Court expecting to find a home there, and now I was obliged to leave it. Where should I go? I had no relations, I was homeless, and felt like a waif. The feeling that there was not a single creature in the wide world who really and truly cared for me, had begun to oppress me greatly.

As I emerged from the marshy glen, in which Verney Court was sunk, a mournful, wailing sound broke upon my ears. I had heard it for some time before, faint and indistinct, and wondered what it was, but now I knew. It was the Irish *keen* for the dead, and I remembered that this was the morning of Shane's funeral.

A turn of the road brought me in sight of the procession, as it came winding slowly down the mountain side, the women wringing their hands and tearing their hair, while they

uttered piercing cries, the men walking two by two, in gloomy silence.

The coffin, upon which were strewed evergreens, was borne on the shoulders of four men. Immediately behind, walked old Miles O'Reilly and Alley, her long brown hair floating in disorder about her.

The romantic nature of the surrounding scenery, the anguished gestures of the women, and their streaming hair, the looks of stern determination and angry defiance on the faces of the men, all combined to make up a wildly picturesque scene, the effect of which was heightened by the mournful wailing.

I stood still till the last of the sad *cortége* had entered the little churchyard. Then I slowly turned homewards, taking the way through the fields, the wild wail of the women still ringing in my ears. Melancholy music to have greeted me the first thing on my

birthday morning! Had I believed in omens, I might have trembled for what it portended.

On crossing the stile which led into the field nearest the house, I was suddenly arrested by a sight which caused me to stand rooted to the spot in horror and amazement.

At my feet yawned a grave—wide and deep—the clay piled up on either side, ready to be shovelled in when it should have received its occupant. At the head stood a large stone, like some of those that lay on the sea-shore. Round it was fastened a piece of paper with these words written in large letters:—

"Tyrant, Oppressor, beware! The grave is yawning for you!"

What hands had dug this mysterious grave? It must have been done during the night. The suggestive warning came, no doubt, from some of the tenantry, and was

intended for Mr. Verney, on whose hands they believed the death of O'Reilly to rest. While I still stood as if spell-bound, I was startled by a hand laid on my shoulder, and, turning quickly round, I met Mr. Verney's eyes. Beside the grave intended for himself, he stood, and gazed into it.

"I know it's meant for me," he said, "the people imagine that I caused the arrest of O'Reilly, though I had nothing whatever to do with it. They think I wished to get him out of the place; but why should I? He was a good tenant, and paid his rent regularly. I wonder who dug this pit. Inquiries must be instituted at once, there are several I suspect; they must all be arrested without delay."

He had been speaking in a sad, quiet tone, but the last words were said quickly, and with the cruel, hyena glare in his eyes, as if

he would like to tear the offenders in pieces.

"It will be better for themselves to put them out of the way of doing harm, before they have actually done it," he said, apologetically. "But come, Miss Melville, there is a chill breeze blowing; you will take cold if you stand here longer."

He offered me his arm; I took it mechanically, and walked by his side to the house.

No further allusion was made to the grave. During breakfast, Mr. Verney talked on indifferent subjects. He never now read at meal times.

When breakfast was over, I went into the kitchen as usual with a plate of bread for Brian Borohme. He was not in the kitchen, so I went up to the gallery to see if he were there.

Just as I entered it, I heard a faint, gasp- [illegible] of sound. I stopped to listen; the

sound was repeated, and then, taking courage, I went on. No ghost became visible, but, stretched before the oaken door, lay the dog, his limbs spread out stiff and rigid, his tongue hanging out of his mouth. He seemed to be dying. I ran to him, and knelt down on the floor beside him. He looked up into my face with a loving expression, and, dragging himself a little nearer to me, laid his head upon my dress.

I bent over him, my tears falling like rain. My poor faithful friend! to lose him at this time, when I was so friendless, was particularly hard. I felt certain that Donal must have given him poison. Life was fast ebbing from the poor animal. Soon the convulsive movements of the limbs ceased, and he gave no further signs of life. Poor Brian Borohme!

While I still bent over him, weeping with

a bitterness which, by some, might be considered too much for the occasion, I heard the shambling footsteps of old Donal coming upstairs.

"Ha! ha! so it's kilt him they have at last," said he, stopping, and looking down on the stiff form of the poor animal. "Is he dead altogether?" and he was about to touch it with his foot, when I interposed my arm.

"I always knew thim ghosts 'ud do for him some day, an' that's why I used to be tryin' to kape him out o' that corridor. I'd advise ye to take it as a warnin', an' not go in their ways. They're mighty spiteful things entirely for ghosts. Sure ye see yerself how they're afther killin' this poor baste."

"*You* killed him," I said, standing up. "You did, I know you did."

"Faith, thin, an' isn't it jest quare the way people always knows what other people ha'

done, betther nor themselves?" remarked Donal, with a puzzled air.

"You killed him," I repeated, "and I will tell Mr. Verney that you did so."

"Ha! ha!" almost shouted the old steward. "Will ye? Ay do, me hinny, ay do, he'll be awful angry, iv coorse, but ould Donal 'll manage to bear his anger. Bedad, this is first-rate; she's a goin' to complain to Mr. Verney on ould Donal, ha! ha!"

I walked away, and went to Mr. Verney's study. In answer to my tap he called to me to enter, and in a moment I stood in the den.

Mr. Verney was seated at the table, which was strewn over with papers, writing. When he saw me, he hastily gathered them together.

Quickly, and in as few words as possible—for now that I was in his presence my

courage began to ooze away—I told him about the death of the dog, and my suspicion, or rather certainty, that Donal had poisoned him.

"I fear he has," said Mr. Verney, when I had ceased speaking. "He seemed to have a great antipathy to the animal. He is really beginning to presume too much. He thinks that because I have retained him so long I cannot part with him; but if he offends *you*, he will find himself mistaken. Believe me, Miss Melville, I am sincerely sorry for what has occurred, and, if you will permit me, I will try to replace the loss of your favourite by obtaining another dog for you, which I promise shall be, at least, equally handsome."

"Thank you; but I do not wish for another dog," I replied.

"I hope you will always let me know, as you have now, whenever Donal does anything to vex you. I should be sorry to think you were not happy here. I have begun of late to fear that Donal takes too much authority upon himself in many ways, with the tenantry, for instance; and in consequence of this, I have got the name of an oppressor, when, in reality, I am not to blame for anything more than carelessness in leaving the management of affairs so much to another. What do you think, Miss Melville?"

I did not know what to say. I thought he was.

"What do you think?" he repeated, with his eyes fixed upon my face.

"I cannot say," I replied.

"I assure you I have not been more," he said, with great appearance of earnestness. "I am aware that such carelessness is culp-

able; but, Miss Melville, if you knew the cause that induced it — the cause that rendered me cold and dead to all around—which left me blighted in the very noon of life, without one interest in the world—hopeless, and faithless—your woman's heart would feel even for me, stern and harsh as I know you deem me."

I knew not what to think or to say. Mr. Verney had never spoken to me like this before. There was feeling in his tone, whether real or assumed, I could not determine. But, why assumed?

That he really believed his wife had deceived and wronged him, Mrs. Baker had told me, and his conduct to Catherine proved it. She had also told me of his grief after his wife's death, which had been so severe as to alter his appearance.

Perhaps, then, after all, he was not quite

so bad, at least not quite so cruel and unfeeling, as I had believed him.

I could not say anything, however, for I felt embarrassed by his sudden confidence and softening of manner, and was about to make my escape from the room, when Mr. Verney stopped me by saying—

"Stay, Miss Melville, I was going to send for you when you came here. This is your birthday."

I had quite forgotten that fact, and all about my determination to speak to Mr. Verney. Was he now going to open the subject himself? I hoped so.

"Sit down, Miss Melville," he said. "I may detain you some minutes."

He had placed a chair for me when I first came in, but I had not taken it. I now sat down.

Mr. Verney turned over and arranged the

papers before him, laying aside some, and taking others from a desk near him. At length he looked up—

"The time has now come when it is necessary for me to explain to you your position," he said. "You have probably wondered why I never spoke to you of your father. The reason for this silence you will presently perceive. You are aware that your father and myself were friends. We had been such from the time we were college companions. I was sincerely attached to him, and he was equally so to me. The fact of his appointing me his daughter's guardian proves the confidence he had in me.

"He was noble-minded, generous, and honourable; but he had one fault, one passion, which, later in life, became so confirmed that it made all his friends—except the few who truly loved him—stand aloof, and was, in

the end, the cause of his ruin and early death. He was—I shrink from saying the word to his daughter—he was a gambler. His whole heart and soul were absorbed in the fatal passion of gambling. Every other interest, every other feeling, gave way before it. I and others often reasoned with him, but in vain; he seemed infatuated. At last, he became irretrievably involved in difficulties, and the more he lost, the deeper he played, hoping that fortune might yet smile upon him. To give up would be immediate ruin and disgrace. He had been sucked into the fatal vortex, and there was no returning.

"He had married a lady, young, beautiful, rich, but all her money—with the exception of a portion which he could not touch—was spent by him, and she—with whom he might have lived so happily—died after the birth of her infant daughter, the victim of a broken heart.

"After the death of his wife, Mr. Melville devoted himself yet more entirely to play, than he had before done. Ruin became inevitable. The only plan for him, if he would avoid arrest for debt, was to leave the country. And to prevent his being obliged to do this, which I knew would put him in the way of still greater temptation, I lent him a large sum of money to meet his most pressing demands. This enabled him to arrange matters. I could not very well spare the money, for I was tight enough myself; but I never regretted having lent it; for, from that time, your father gave up gambling. But, unfortunately, he did not live more than a year after.

"I was at this place when the message reached me that he was dying, and wished particularly to see me. I instantly hastened to him, and arrived in time to witness the

drawing up of his will, in which he appointed me your guardian.

"Before his death he delivered to me a sealed packet, requesting that I would not open it till he was dead. He died the day after my arrival.

"I told you that there was a part of your mother's fortune which could not be touched. This was settled on her daughter—yourself—then six years old.

"When I opened the packet I found that it contained two letters; one, addressed to his daughter, to be delivered to her on her twenty-first birthday; the other, to myself. The contents of this, when I read it, filled me with astonishment and grief, because it showed how much the non-payment of the money I had lent him had troubled the mind of my poor friend on his dying bed. The thought that, by his death I would lose all

chance of receiving it, seemed to distress him excessively, for he was a strictly honourable man.

"What astonished me was the plan he proposed by which I might be repaid, though at a distant day. I will now deliver to you your father's letter, which will, doubtless, explain this plan."

He searched for a minute among his papers, then handed me a letter sealed with black wax, bearing my father's crest. The envelope was yellow, and discoloured. On the back, in handwriting which I at once recognised as my father's, was written, "For my dear daughter, Grace, to be given to her on her twenty-first birthday." I opened the letter with trembling hands. The contents, which I read—with what feelings of horror and dismay no words can describe—were as follows:—

"My Dear Daughter,—

"When you read these words, the hand which now writes them will long since have crumbled to dust, and the thought of this ought—and I trust will—give a sacredness in your eyes to the wish I here express, which will make you feel unwilling to disregard it.

"I am under deep obligations to my friend, your guardian, Mr. Verney. At a time when all other friends stood aloof, he remained by my side, and did for me what not one of them would do, though far better able than he was. He lent me a large sum of money to meet some pressing demands for which I must otherwise have been thrown into prison, or fled, dishonoured and disgraced, to a foreign country. In order to lend me this money, I know that Mr. Verney had to make many personal sacrifices, and that he suffers, and

will continue to suffer for his generosity, till it is repaid. I had hoped to have refunded this money in a year or so; but I am now dying, and the thought that he will never receive it troubles me extremely, for why should he be a sufferer by me?

"My daughter, he must be repaid. There is but one way by which he can be, and that depends on you. On the day that you receive this letter you become the possessor of a fortune which amounts to the sum that Mr. Verney lent me. This money being secured to you, I have no control over it, and therefore cannot —even if I were willing to leave you penniless—use it to pay this debt. My child, start not, shrink not, at the proposal I am about to make. I am aware that it involves some sacrifice on your part; but if you have any of the pride and spirit of your family, you will be as anxious as I am that this debt

should be paid, and willing to sacrifice something for that purpose. Will you become the wife of Mr. Verney? By that means, and that alone, he can be repaid. This is the plan I propose; that you agree to it is my most earnest wish, which I request, which I entreat, which I command, you will not disobey. It is not a very hard one to comply with. Mr. Verney, I feel certain, will do everything in his power to make you happy. I appeal to your sense of honour, to your reverence and respect for my memory, that you comply with this last wish of

"YOUR DYING FATHER.

"Trusting that you will do so, I depart in peace. Farewell, my poor little orphaned child—but I forget, when you read this you will be a woman, yet I trust you will not have quite forgotten the love which, when

you kissed me half-an-hour since, I saw shining in your childish eyes."

When I had finished reading this letter, I believe I sat motionless for some time. I felt too stunned by the dreadful proposal it contained, to stir or speak. The letter lay on my lap; there was no need for me to read it a second time, for every word of it seemed graven upon my brain. Though I knew that Mr. Verney was watching me closely, I did not look up; I felt faint. Everything seemed to swim before my eyes, and the words I had been reading rang in my ears like a voice from the grave. How could I disobey them? Before my mind rose the image of my father, as I remembered him; tall, handsome, with a luxuriant, silky brown beard, which I used to be fond of pulling when he raised me in his arms. I had a great admiration for that beard, and was very proud of my father's

appearance. Even now, I could scarcely help smiling as some childish words, expressive of this admiration, occurred to me. I had been asking some one to come and let me introduce him to my father. "Do come and see my papa," I said; "he's such a pretty papa."

I could not help thinking, though I tried not to do so, that this request of my father was inconsiderate, unreasonable, cruel. At the time when he wrote this letter, I was but six years old, Mr. Verney more than thirty; it seemed an extraordinary arrangement for him to make. I could not come to any conclusion as to what I ought to do. Active thought seemed impossible. I could only fall into a reverie. Mr. Verney's wife! The bare idea sent thrills of horror and loathing through my frame. At length I stood up, and laid the letter on the table beside Mr. Verney.

"Will you not keep it?" he said. "Your father's letter."

I had scarcely known what I was doing; and again taking it up, put it into my pocket.

"What you have just read has of course surprised you very much," said Mr. Verney. "I expected that it would. When I read the letter addressed to me I was equally astonished, and for a long time felt greatly puzzled how I should act. At one time I thought that I would not give you your father's letter, that you should never know his dying wish. It seemed unfair that your young life should be sacrificed to me. But then I considered that I would not be justified in such a course. Your father had solemnly charged me to deliver it to you. Yet I did not finally decide to do so till some months

after you came here. I then saw how honourable you were, how high principled; and it seemed as if to keep this arrangement a secret from you would be a fraud both on father and daughter. I saw, too, that you were sensible, and I thought that it might not be as distasteful to you as to some. And so," continued Mr. Verney, "I resolved that I would give you the letter, and let your good sense and honourable feeling decide what should be done. I am sure you will see that this arrangement is the best and wisest which can be made, everything considered. You will be provided for, and I shall be paid. But do not think that I second your father's request merely for this reason—though at present unfortunate circumstances make the receipt of this money extremely important to me. Your qualities, Miss Melville, have in-

spired me with a great esteem and respect for you, and if you become my wife, I will try to make your life as happy as possible."

He paused for a moment, as if he expected me to speak, but I could say nothing, and he, seeming to think that my silence meant consent, went on. I do not very well remember what he said, for at the time I hardly heeded his words; but I know that they were pointing out the advantages which I would have as his wife, and the happiness I would enjoy in that position. I could have everything just as I wished; he would not interfere with any arrangements I chose to make. Verney Court should be refurnished, and put into proper order. I could have as much company as I pleased; or, if I wished to reside elsewhere, a house should be taken in whatever locality I mentioned. If I would like to live in

England, he had no objection. At length he stopped, and said—

"Well, Miss Melville, what is your answer? Will you comply with your father's dying wish?"

"I must have time to think," I said.

"Well, then, will you give me your answer to-morrow?" he asked.

"As soon as I have come to a decision, you shall know it," I replied.

He looked dissatisfied, but said nothing.

"I suppose I may go now," I said, longing to be alone.

"Yes," he replied, "and I shall be much obliged if you will decide as quickly as possible, because—for reasons which I would find it difficult to explain to you—it is very necessary that you should. This arrangement ought to be completed with as little

delay as may be; you know that such would have been your father's wish. And there is really little that requires consideration in the matter. A few moments thought will show you that this is the best course you can pursue; there is, in fact, no other, except such as would not consist with your honourable feeling, and respect for your father's memory."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. BAKER'S ADVICE.

When I left Mr. Verney's study, I shut myself into my own room, and sitting down on the first chair, leant my forehead, which was burning hot, on my hand, and tried to think; but, for some time, thought seemed impossible, and I could only repeat again and again the words of my father's letter—

"He must be repaid, and there is but one way by which he can be."

At length I started up, exclaiming half aloud—

"Yes, there is but one way, and that is

not by my becoming his wife, but by my giving up my fortune to him. Strange, that I did not think of this simple plan before, the first, one would imagine, to suggest itself to me. By this, my father's wish would be obeyed in the spirit of it, though not the letter, for it was solely that Mr. Verney might receive my fortune, he wished me to marry him. I would be penniless, but what of that? I had hands, I could work, and, even if I could not, I could die. Sooner death a thousand times than marriage to Mr. Verney. It seemed a monstrous, unnatural thing. How could my father have thought of it?"

That evening, I sought an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Baker, for I wished to tell her all that I had heard. She listened in silence, occasionally shaking her head in a manner that seemed to imply doubt and

suspicion. I also told her of the decision that I had come to.

"But, my dear Miss Grace," said she, "Sure you won't give up your fortune without first getting good proof that this money is really owing?"

"You forget my father's letter," I returned. "It is sufficient proof."

"I don't know, I don't know," said the housekeeper, slowly shaking her head, "I think you should have proof besides what Mr. Verney himself shows you. I've my suspicions that all's not right. Of course I can't say anything, but I just advise you not to put faith in a word he says, or in anything that he shows you, even though it be a letter in your own father's handwriting. Just act quite independent of what he tells you, and don't consider any proof that comes through his hands as proof at all. The

whole thing has a very queer sort of look. I suspected it wasn't for nothing that Mr. Verney turned so affable to you all of a sudden. You should get the advice of a friend."

"I have no friend to get advice from."

"Mr. Nugent," suggested the housekeeper.

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed, feeling the blood rush to my face. "I would not trouble him for the world. Why should I? What are my affairs to him? It would be taking a great liberty."

"Indeed, then, I'm sure he wouldn't think it a liberty at all, and I know he would be very glad to assist you in any way he could."

"But I wouldn't like to write to him. I think Mr. Nugent dislikes me," I added, hesitatingly.

"Dislikes you! What nonsense, my dear Miss Grace," said Mrs. Baker. "What can have put such a notion into your head?"

"Mr. Nugent's manner has always been so cold and distant to me, at least, not always, perhaps," I said, feeling embarrassed, "but when I had been here about two months it became so."

Mrs. Baker mused.

"Well, that was because you began to be cold and distant to him just about that time. Your manner towards him changed quite suddenly, I couldn't but remark it, and I know Mr. Nugent himself noticed it, too."

"How do you know?" I asked, quickly.

"Well, one day, I heard Mr. Nugent ask Miss Catherine if you were offended with him about anything."

"Yes! and what did she say?"

"Oh, she said she didn't know, and then began to speak of something else."

I remained silent for some minutes. It now appeared clear that the alteration in

Mr. Nugent's manner had only been caused by the change in my own.

"I hope you have resolved to write to Mr. Nugent, Miss Grace," said Mrs. Baker, after a little while. "For I have just thought of another reason why you should. It has occurred to me this moment that he must know something of this affair, or, at least, be able to get information about it, for I remember now, that the message which Mr. Verney told you he received, summoning him to the deathbed of Mr. Melville, was written by Mr. Nugent's uncle. I saw the note lying about, after Mr. Verney went, but, it never struck me till now that you were the daughter of that Mr. Melville. So, as Mr. Nugent—I mean Mr. Cecil's uncle—and your father were friends, and he was with him just before his death, what more likely than that he should know about this debt to Mr.

Verney, and about the letter? Your father may have written it under compulsion, or when his mind was weakened by illness, or he may not— Mr. Nugent, however, will be almost sure to know something. You can say in your letter to Mr. Cecil, that I told you his uncle and your father had been friends."

"Yes, and I shall write at once," I said.

"And when your letter is ready don't put it into the bag. How do we know," murmured she, "but what it mightn't go at all if you did that? But just walk to the Post-office with it yourself to-morrow."

That night I wrote the note, as short and concise as possible, and, as I thought a little delay might be an advantage, I told Mr. Verney next morning, that I could not give him an answer before a week. His countenance darkened, but he made no objection.

CHAPTER VIII.

"With blackest moss the flower-pots
Were thickly crusted, one and all,
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the peach to the garden wall.

"All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd,
The blue-fly sung i' the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about."

LETTERS were delivered at Verney Court three times a week, and when on the second morning after I had written to Dublin, I saw from my window the messenger coming, I felt almost certain that he brought me an answer from Mr. Nugent. When I went down, which I did immediately, I saw a letter in his

handwriting lying on the table. I seized it eagerly, and then, to my surprise and disappointment, perceived that it was addressed to Mr. Verney, not to me. Could he have written to Mr. Verney on the subject of my inquiries? Possibly, and he might write to me in a day or two.

Mr. Verney read the letter with a strange expression of countenance. Having finished, he quitted the room, and I heard him call Donal. I expected that he would speak to me during the day, but he did not. He remained in his den till evening, and when he appeared, his manner was strangely restless and abrupt, and a peculiar light gleamed in his eyes; a fierce, merciless light, which made them look more hyena-like than ever. I shrank and trembled beneath their cruel glare, when they lighted upon me. Whether the letter of the morning had really alluded to

my affairs or not, I did not ascertain till some time afterwards.

The next day for delivery of letters passed over without bringing me one, and the next, and the next, in like manner. And so the dreary days of the week I had asked for wore on, and each day was drearier than the last.

The mouldering old mansion seemed to me like a sepulchre, in which I was entombed alive, and cut off from all communication with the outside world.

Since Catherine's flight, and the departure of the servants, the stillness was awful. Not a sound broke it save the ticking of the clocks, loud and distinct in the silence; the low, monotonous tapping of the door of my room—which went on day and night without intermission—the shrieking of the rats behind the wainscoting, and the occasional falling of a quantity of mortar in the galleries.

The house was crumbling to a complete ruin before the eyes of those condemned to live in it. The paper on the damp walls hung loose and discoloured. Mould began to gather on the furniture. Cobwebs hung from the ceilings and curtains, and surrounded the pictures like a second frame.

Outside, the scene was just as dreary. Black moss encrusted the door steps. The dark river, which flowed through the grounds, crept sluggishly along, like a great black toad. The few gaunt trees seemed to have forgotten to bud, or to be too dispirited to show any such signs of life. And like a sepulchre in the middle of some disused graveyard the lonely house stood.

It would not have required any great stretch of imagination to believe that it was really haunted. Often at night, or when I was in the gallery which had formerly com-

municated with the old wing, I heard strange, unaccountable noises, that seemed to proceed from that quarter; moans, faint cries, peals of low, unearthly laughter. And once or twice, when I was out in the grounds after dark, I thought I saw a light gleaming through the chinks of the boards that blocked up the window of the ruined chamber.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. VERNEY'S DEN.

THE state of my affairs was now becoming so very urgent that I could think of nothing else.

The week was ended, and I was not better able to give Mr. Verney an answer, than when it had begun. My expectations of hearing from Mr. Nugent were becoming fainter and fainter. On the last night, I sat down to consider seriously how I should act, what I should say to Mr. Verney the following morning.

The conclusion to which I at length came

was, that I must ask for more time, and write to my old friend and former schoolmistress, Mrs. Compton. She had told me to apply to her if ever in trouble or difficulty, and surely I was now in both.

Perhaps she would be willing to employ me as a teacher of drawing, for I had some skill in that art, and much taste for it.

Before going to bed, I wrote the letter, and rose very early next morning, that I might have time to walk to the post-office with it, and come back before any one was up; as I wished to avoid Donal's ever watchful eyes.

When I returned, I left a line on the breakfast table for Mr. Verney, saying that I was not prepared to give him an answer for a week longer, and excused myself from appearing at breakfast, on the plea of a headache, lest he should question me about why

I wanted more time. At dinner he could not, Donal being present.

In the evening, as I was sitting alone in the oaken parlour, trying to read, but glancing from my book every moment towards the dark corners of the room, Mr. Verney entered, and, saying that he wanted to speak with me for a few moments, requested that I would come with him to his study.

I trembled with a strange sense of fear, that seemed almost unaccountable, at the thought of going to the den at this hour. Why could he not say what he wanted here? But I did not know how to refuse.

His glittering, light blue eyes were fixed upon me with a strange, steady gaze, such as I had never before encountered from him; and, feeling as if I must obey his will, I rose and followed him reluctantly.

When we entered the den, he shut the

door, and then, to my horror and dumb amazement—for I felt as if a spell were gathering over me, and I could not speak—he turned the key in the lock, and, taking it out, he put it into his pocket.

Then he walked slowly towards me, where I stood leaning against the table for support, and, having placed a chair for me, took one himself, directly opposite, and sitting down, fastened his eyes upon my face, with the same strangely intense look that he had lately bent upon me, but he said not a word.

When this fixed gaze had continued for some minutes, and still he spoke not, I opened my lips with the intention of asking what he wanted with me, but it seemed as if I could not utter a syllable. His eyes appeared to hold me in a spell which I felt totally unable to break through.

A terror came over me at my own helpless-

ness. I felt as people sometimes feel in a nightmare, when trying to awaken themselves. I knew that I was not in a natural state, yet was unable to arouse myself. But I could think. I was conscious that Mr. Verney was mesmerising me, and I wondered for what purpose he was doing so.

With feelings of alarm I looked forward to the moment which I felt would soon come, when I must succumb. The spell was beginning to affect my thoughts. I could not think as I wished. My mind was becoming a blank.

At length, Mr. Verney rose, and I fancied I saw him take a paper from the table, then, passing round to the side of my chair, he laid his hand on my shoulder.

If he thought to increase his power over me by doing this, he was mistaken. Instantly *the tide* of thought rushed back to my mind.

The dream-like dimness that had rested upon surrounding objects, faded quickly away, and I stood up. The spell which had held me captive, dissolved.

Mr. Verney immediately removed his eyes, and stepped back a few paces, murmuring some words to himself, which I could not hear.

"Mr. Verney, Mr. Verney!" I cried, at once taking advantage of my recovered freedom to speak.

"Open the door, and let me go, or I shall scream for help. I don't know what you want with me."

And, almost beside myself with fear of him, I rushed to the door and shook the handle violently.

Just then, I thought I heard the sound of the housekeeper's footsteps in one of the adjoining galleries, and, calling her, I again rattled the handle.

With a brow that was black as a thunder cloud, and eyes that seemed to emit actual flashes of lightning, Mr. Verney approached, and, seizing me by the arm with a grasp that left its purple mark there for days after, tried to drag me from the door.

"Be quiet, girl; you'd better," he muttered from between his tightly clenched teeth, while he pressed his disengaged hand over my mouth so closely that I felt almost suffocating.

But the footsteps were coming nearer. They had now entered the corridor leading to the study.

Mr. Verney heard them, and instantly releasing me, he took the key from his pocket, and, unlocking the door, held it open.

As I passed out, I stole a timid glance at his face, and the baffled expression it wore was frightful to see.

Mrs. Baker was standing in the corridor, pale, and scared looking.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a frightened whisper. "Good gracious! Miss, you're as white as a sheet, and trembling from head to foot."

I could not answer. But when we went to her room, I recounted the strange scene that had taken place. She, however, was unable to afford me any assistance in unravelling the mystery of Mr. Verney's behaviour. But it appeared pretty clear that it was my having still put off the decision he had expected to hear that day, which had caused him to act as he did; yet what purpose he meant to serve by it seemed inexplicable.

"It may be," said Mrs. Baker, "that he wanted to get you to sign some document or other, promising to marry him, or to give

up your fortune. I'm sure I wish you could get out of this ill-omened house. When you go away, you may be sure it's not long I'll remain after. I'd have gone when Miss Catherine left, if it weren't for your sake."

That night, I got Mrs. Baker to share my room. I felt so thoroughly unstrung and nervous, I feared that I was about to have an attack of illness. Perhaps, however, my strong wish not to be ill in this house, and under present circumstances, had some effect in warding it off.

The next time that I saw Mr. Verney, his manner was cold and stern as it was when I first came to Verney Court. He made no attempt to entertain me as he had of late begun to do.

I, of course, felt more than ever constrained in his presence now, and avoided him whenever possible. It seemed strange to remain under the same roof with the man who, it

appeared to me, had been almost on the point of murdering me. At first I had thought that I could not stay a single day at Verney Court, after what had passed—that I must fly from it instantly, anywhere. But it is much easier to fly anywhere, in theory than in practice. And I was obliged to abandon the idea, and remain.

Two days after the strange scene in Mr. Verney's den, I was standing at the kitchen fire, holding a newspaper listlessly in my hand, and watching Mrs. Baker, who was busy making bread. I liked to be near her whenever I could. She was the only person in the house who was not mysterious. The newspaper I held was a week old, and it was more to use as a shade from the hot turf fire, than to read, that I had taken it up. Suddenly, however, my eye fell upon a name which caused me to start, and glance back hastily to see in what connection it was used.

"Look, Mrs. Baker," I exclaimed. "What can this mean?"

"Just read it for me yourself," said she. "My hands are full of flour."

And, accordingly, I read aloud this advertisement—

"A reward of 100 pounds is offered to any person who can throw some light on the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Charles Graydon, supposed to have been killed in a railway accident nineteen years ago."

Then followed the name and address—that of some lawyer—to which information was to be sent.

Before I had concluded, Mrs. Baker was at my side, reading with me.

"Good gracious! what can it mean?" she exclaimed, sitting down, pale and trembling, with the newspaper in her hand. "Supposed to have been killed in a railway accident!"

And if not, what happened to him? How was he killed? Strange! that this advertisement should appear after nineteen long years. I wonder who can have put it in. And what—"

She stopped, for the latch of the door was suddenly raised, and old Donal, whose footsteps had not previously been heard in the passage, came in.

He glanced at once, with a sharp, suspicious look, at the paper lying in Mrs. Baker's lap, and from it to her disturbed face, while a twinkle came into his eye.

"Bedad!" he said, standing opposite to her, "this ain't a busy day wid ye, whin yiv time to be readin' papers at elevin o'clock in the mornin'. But mebbe if ye war to look about a bit, ye'd find somethin' to be doin'; 'pears to me ye're forgitin' them loaves there, intirely. By gor! there must be mighty in-

terestin' news in it for a paper, I'm thinkin'. Couldn't ye now jest let ould Donal have a peep at what's absorbin' ye so? it's not fair to be afther kapin' all the fun to yerselves."

"It's only a trial," said Mrs. Baker, turning the paper.

"The makins iv a thrial mebbe it is ye'd be afther manin'," returned old Donal, with a malicious grin. "Bedad! there's them as could make many a thrial if they war to be so inclined. An' by gor! mebbe they will be, some day or ither. Herself's tickin' in a quare, irregular sort o' way, seems to me, jest as if she'd got a touch o' the asthma. I thought I heerd her, an' that was what brought me in."

He dragged a chair towards his victim, and getting on it, began what I knew well would be a work of some time. So, as I wished to call at the post-office in the village, I went away.

I had resolved that I would call there myself every day, instead of waiting for letters to be brought to the house. It would be the most satisfactory way. For how could I tell, after all, whether letters might not have come for me during the past week? If Mr. Verney saw a letter in Mr. Nugent's hand, directed to me, and if he knew that Mr. Nugent had it in his power to give me any information, which for his own purposes he wished me to remain in ignorance of, what more likely than that he would keep it back?

As I walked across the breezy common, towards the village, I felt a little more hopeful than of late. For I was almost certain that to-day I would receive Mrs. Compton's answer, and equally so that it would contain a cordial invitation to me to go to her, which I intended to take instant advantage of, and leave Verney Court the following

day, if possible. I was resolved to make no arrangement at present about giving up my fortune; and, in order to prevent any attempt on Mr. Verney's part to persuade or force me to do so, would not let him know that I was going away till I was actually about to quit the house.

These reflections were often interrupted by others about the strange advertisement that I had just seen. And dreadful thoughts and conjectures, which I did not dare fully to form, kept crowding to my mind.

When I entered the post-office, which was also a provision shop, the man who kept it, Mick Conlan, was talking with a neighbour at the upper end, and did not see me. While I waited, I could not help hearing what they were saying.

"Bedad, then," said the neighbour, "yourself an' ould Donal Dhue have got as thick as

two thieves iv late. Sure, it's in here wid you he does be every day iv his life. Faith, I wondher you'd be after havin' anythin' at all to say to sich an ould varmint. It's little good he'll be doin' you, I'm thinking."

"Musha," returned Mick Conlan, "what's the harm o' bein' civil to him? Sure, it's nothing I'd gain by bein' cross an' rude. Faith, if I war to meet the divil himself, I'd say good mornin' to him."

"Oh, by gor, then," returned the other, "that's a boy it'd be betther to say good night to."

At this moment, Mick Conlan perceived me, and advanced with a somewhat confused air. I inquired if there was a letter. Having examined the various heaps, he returned empty-handed, saying—

"No letter to day, Miss."

And with tears of bitter disappointment forcing themselves into my eyes, I turned away.

What I had heard aroused my suspicions. Why had Mick Conlan suddenly become so intimate with old Donal? Could it be that he was bribed to keep back my letters? If so, I was completely in Mr. Verney's power. I might write and write, but if he could have the answers kept back, what use?

A sort of dead calm—the calm of utter despair—began to take possession of me. I could do nothing. I must only wait, and see if anything would happen. But, oh! how very short a time remained in which anything could happen!

I had walked down to the seashore, and as I stood watching the waves come roaring and rushing on, to break with a mighty cry of

despair on the rocky coast, I thought of my own hopes shattered, too, against rocks; of the vague dreams I had cherished—all vanished and gone, their rosy hue faded, nothing remaining of them but the remembrance, and the knowledge that they had been but dreams.

I did not think now of my immediate troubles. I had done that till I was weary, and it was useless. The waves, as they broke and died, flung wreaths of seaweed at my feet. I picked up one of them, and while I idly twined it round my fingers, gazing sadly while I did so on the dark face of the surging waters, I reflected dreamily how like that ocean was, in its ceaseless restlessness, to the unquiet human heart, surging continually, as if it would break its bonds and be free; for ever sending up a wordless cry to the calm sky above; tossed and agitated by

every wind; never at peace, never at rest—or, if ever, like that ocean, for how very short a time!

What hand can still its raging, and lull its wild waves? None, perhaps, but His who calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee, and said to the winds and waves, "Peace, be still." But we are weak. We start away from that invisible Hand, and stretch out imploring arms for some other human arm to which we can cling, and turn our dim eyes around for some human face, to which we can look up as we journey towards that unknown shore "where no wind blows."

CHAPTER XI.

HOPE REVIVED.

When I returned, Mrs. Baker met me in the hall. She looked very mysterious and important, and held something concealed under her apron.

"I want to speak to you for a minute, Miss Grace," she said, in a mysterious whisper, and led the way to her own room. I followed, wondering what new mystery could have arisen.

As soon as we were in the room, she drew forth a torn, half-burnt envelope, and held it out to me, saying—

"Do you recognise this, Miss Grace?"

I took it, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, for it was directed to Mr. Nugent, and in my own handwriting.

"It is the envelope of the letter I sent to Mr. Nugent!" I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"Yes, I knew it was," said Mrs. Baker. "And do you know where I found it? Under the grate in Mr. Verney's room, this morning. Miss Grace, this shows plainly that Mr. Verney keeps back your letters."

"I posted this one myself in the village," I said. But just then I thought of the dialogue I had heard that morning in the post-office. It was now quite clear that Mick Conlan was in league with Donal, and bribed to give him my letters. I was the victim of some deep-laid plot.

"Oh! what shall I do, Mrs. Baker?" I cried, clasping my hands. And then I told her what I had heard.

"You must write again," said she.

"But the letter will be kept back."

"We must think of some means to prevent that," she replied.

"I fear there is no means."

Mrs. Baker sat down and reflected for some minutes, while I watched her, too despairing to think myself.

"I think I know how it can be managed," she said, at length. "Bill Malone is going to town to-morrow, to a fair. Let him take the letter and post it."

"Oh, yes," I cried. "But what about the answer? If it comes here I shall not get it."

"It mustn't come here. Let me see. Malone won't be returning for two or three days. Couldn't you request Mr. Nugent to direct it to the town post-office, and Bill could call for the letter and bring it to you?"

"Yes, of course; it's an excellent plan. What should I do without you, Mrs. Baker?"

"Two heads are better than one," said the housekeeper, opening the door.

I instantly ran off for pen and ink, and, once again, began a letter to Cecil Nugent.

In the evening, Mrs. Baker made an excuse of going out, and took it to Bill Malone, who willingly promised to do what was required of him. We knew him to be a faithful, trustworthy fellow, and one that could not easily be bought. If Donal, by some of his incomprehensible ways, got to suspect anything, and attempted to make advances to him, he would know well how to put him off.

The day before that on which Malone was expected home, I was sitting in a field at some distance from the house. It was a fine, mild day, and things were beginning to wear a spring-like aspect.

I had brought out a book, but my mind was too occupied with conjectures as to what the morrow would bring forth, for me to be able to settle to reading. When people are in grief, even the severest, books are an alleviation; but when anxious and expectant, they are useless.

I was leaning on the open volume, with my head resting on my hand, when I heard voices and steps on the other side of the hedge. As they came nearer, I started up, and listened with parted lips and palpitating heart.

Did I not know that quick firm tread? Did I not know that voice? Could it be—could it be—. At this moment, the branches, at a little distance, where there was a gap in the hedge, were pushed aside; some one sprang across, and I was face to face with Cecil Nugent. My emotions of surprise and

joy at sight of him were so great that I felt almost overcome by them, for I considered that I was now saved. With Cecil Nugent near, I could not feel afraid of anything. I was no longer completely in Mr. Verney's power. When the first greetings were over, Mr. Nugent said—

"I received your letter yesterday, and hastened here at once to answer it in person. My uncle has come with me," he added, as a fine-looking elderly gentleman, advanced. "My uncle," continued Cecil, "will be able to give you information on the subject about which you wrote to me."

"Yes," said Mr. Nugent, senior, "I first made the acquaintance of Mr. Verney at college, and I have committed to writing"—taking a roll of papers from his pocket—"all that I know of him, and of his connection with your father, together with other circum-

stances, which only came to my knowledge during the last month, and which cast a terrible suspicion on Mr. Verney's past life. There is also here," said he, as he gave me the papers, "an account of events that relate to Miss Verney, in whose fate you are naturally interested."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "have you heard anything of her? Do you know where she is?"

"No; what we have heard, if we can believe it, renders that a question more difficult than ever to answer, and makes her flight seem very mysterious. As to yourself, you need not feel in the least uneasy, for Mr. Verney has no real power over you."

"No legal power, perhaps," I returned. "But if my father died owing him money, I consider myself bound to pay it, by giving up

to him whatever fortune I would otherwise possess."

"But your father did not die owing him money. He has no claim whatever upon you, Miss Melville; and the fact alone of his having attempted to deceive you by such a representation, makes his house the most unfit place possible for you to stay in a day longer than you can help. I am obliged to leave this immediately; but my nephew remains, and if you will accept of an invitation to my house in Dublin, till your affairs are settled, I shall feel highly honoured. You could arrange, perhaps, to leave here, say, the day after to-morrow. Would that suit?"

I warmly thanked Mr. Nugent, of course accepting his invitation; indeed, I had no choice but to do so. Having settled to leave on the day he mentioned, I parted from him.

Arrived at Verney Court, I hurried at once to my own room, and sat down to peruse these papers, which I now place before the reader.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. NUGENT'S NARRATIVE.

In complying with your request to learn what I know of Mr. Verney's connection with your father, it will be necessary for me to introduce many things which may not, at least at first, seem directly to bear upon that subject; but they are so closely interwoven with it that it would be difficult to separate them without the danger of leaving out what is essential to be told, or affecting your clear comprehension of the matter. So that it is better I should relate the whole story from the beginning of my acquaintance with Mr. Verney.

"My brother—Cecil's father—and I were at college with Mr. Verney and your father. Verney was clever and brilliant, and was much admired by his companions.

"Among his particular friends were my brother and Henry Melville, over both of whom his influence was extreme. He was passionately fond of gambling, and every night, a number of students would gather in his rooms for this purpose.

"There was, however, a rival to his influence, Charles Percival Graydon, a young man of noble family, and possessed of great talent. His admirers were as many as those of Verney, who was very jealous of him; and this ill-will was fostered by their being so often obliged to start in competition for college honours, when Graydon, who studied much more than Verney, was usually the victor. I tried to withdraw my brother, and

also Melville—whom I had known before entering college, and had a great friendship for—from Verney's influence, but in vain.

"There is one other person I should mention, who, though I then considered him of little importance, afterwards appeared in a very different light. This was a sizar, named Edward Horton. He was apparently a harmless, good sort of fellow, and seemed to be of neither party. sIay seemed, for I discovered later, though not fully, indeed, until within the last month, that he had been completely a creature of Verney's.

"On leaving college, Verney's influence over Melville and my brother, continued, as also did the rivalry begun there between him and Graydon. It seemed as if these two were always to be placed in opposition to each other.

"Both became candidates for the love of

the same lady. This new, and more intense description of rivalry had, indeed, begun before leaving college, and it increased to a fearful extent Verney's hatred of Graydon, especially as he could not but perceive that Graydon was the more favoured suitor.

"She was an actress. A beautiful creature, and quite unprotected. Timid, and easily influenced; and, though it was evident that she loved Graydon, Verney had great power over her.

"When we first became acquainted with her, she was not more than nineteen, and had only been on the stage a few months. The sweetness and artlessness of her manner surpassed even her beauty, which was of that fragile and *spirituelle* order that we so rarely meet with, in which the charms of the woman seem to have undergone a sort of glorifica-

tion. I had never before seen any one so exquisitely lovely, nor have I ever since. She was more like the embodiment of a poet's ideal, than an ordinary mortal. Masses of rich, shining gold hair clustered in lavish luxuriance around her small, beautifully formed head, and rested on her pure white forehead, like sunbeams on a mound of snow; while her deep blue eyes, shaded by their long, dark, gold-tipped lashes, looked timidly forth like violets from among dark leaves.

"Sweet, gentle Catherine Lawrence, you were dowered with a fatal gift! Better far, had Nature been less generous, for then the baleful eyes that looked upon you would never have lingered there. Fair flower! better that your beauty had faded ere reaching its glorious perfection—that the sweet bud had drooped and withered on its stem

before a single leaf was unfolded—than have lived to attract the attention of Julian Verney.

"Pure dove! fascinated by the serpent, unable to fly away, trembling with fear, and fluttering your white wings helplessly. Timid fawn! caught in the cruel snare that was laid for you. Catherine, you are with the angels, now; but how can I recall you without emotion? I see your face before me now, I hear your low, thrilling voice, and the dead Past seems to start into life once again.

"But none of this is to the point.

"Though possessed of considerable talent, and that of an order in many respects suited to the stage, the character of Catherine Lawrence was too soft and gentle for the profession of an actress. She was made for retirement and domestic life—to be the centre of a *circle* of admiring friends, the object of an

adoring husband's love—not to stand in the face of a crowded theatre, with the eyes of thousands all bent upon her beauty. But her father, who had been dead a year when we came to know her, had filled a situation in the orchestra, and so she had naturally been led into the theatrical line. Many a one, besides Graydon and Verney, would have been glad to take her from it; but it was plain that her heart was wholly Graydon's.

"We used to go every night to the theatre where she acted; Graydon, I, and one or two others, forming one party. Verney, my brother, and Melville, another. Horton used to hang between the two, sometimes he would be of Verney's, sometimes of Graydon's. He, too, adored the beautiful young actress, but at a distance. I believe he would as soon have thought of cutting off his hand, as of entering the lists with Verney and

Graydon. His character was weak, undecided, and timorous, and it was more from lack of courage to do so, than because he knew her love was already engaged, that he did not. He had not sufficient daring to attempt competition in anything with these two master spirits. If ever any jesting allusion was made in the presence of Graydon and Verney to his *penchant* for the young actress, he would turn pale, be seized with a fit of trembling, and humbly entreat his tormentors to be quiet. Of course this behaviour only made him be annoyed a great deal more than if he had met it in a manly manner. I believe he thought that if Graydon or Verney came to know of his love for Miss Lawrence, they would shoot him. Both, however, knew of it perfectly well, and were quite indifferent. They feared no rivals but each other; least of all Edward Horton, the

sizar. Graydon treated him with a sort of good-natured pity, that was not without a dash of contempt. Verney ridiculed him to his face, yet he was kind to him, specially kind, indeed, at which we all wondered; but if Horton received substantial benefits, he was not one who would grumble at being kicked (metaphorically) occasionally. Though extremely anxious to conciliate both sides, he was oftenest with Verney, and frequently they were observed walking together engaged in close conversation.

"In this way, things went on for about a year, when Graydon went away to France for the purpose of paying a visit to his family, who had been living for some time on the continent for the benefit of his father's health. They were opposed to his marriage with the young actress. They wished him to marry a lady of their own choice. But he was

resolved, and refused to yield. Before going away, he became definitely engaged to Miss Lawrence, and a time not very distant was fixed for their marriage—as soon as he returned, I believe. He tried to persuade her to give up acting at once, but she would not consent to do this. I think one reason for his entering into a decided engagement at this particular time, was, lest Verney might take any unfair advantage of his absence; for, though he knew Miss Lawrence loved him, he was also well aware of Verney's influence over her, and dreaded how it might act if he were not present to counteract it. Once engaged, he knew he could depend upon her constancy. At parting, he presented her with a beautiful ring, which he had got specially made, the jewels being arranged so as to form the letters of her Christian name.

"About this time, I was obliged to go to

England, and to remain there for some years. The next news I heard of Graydon was his marriage. I saw it in a newspaper, and imagine my surprise and perplexity, when I perceived that it was not to Miss Lawrence, but to the lady that his family wished him to marry. I did not know what to think. I could scarcely believe it was true, Graydon was a man of such strict honour. I instantly wrote to him, and soon got a reply. It was short and abrupt, written evidently in great bitterness of feeling, yet with an attempt at levity, that was very painful. The tone was that of a man who has received a wound so deep and deadly, that he does not care to unbare it to the view of others.

"It was quite true that he was married, and he was now enjoying his honeymoon, but his falsehood had been caused by that of Miss Lawrence. It appeared

that, about a month after going to France, he had met Horton, who had obtained a tutorship in a nobleman's family, and was travelling with his pupil. He told him that Miss Lawrence was about to be married to Verney; that she had given up her engagement at the theatre. And he showed him a paragraph in a newspaper announcing the marriage. In spite of this evidence, Graydon would not be convinced. He could not believe that Miss Lawrence was really false to him, and resolved to start immediately for Ireland. But the next morning there came a small packet directed to him in the hand he knew so well. On tearing it open, he found that it contained a miniature of himself, which he had once given Miss Lawrence in exchange for her own. It was enclosed in a blank sheet of paper.

"What he felt on receiving this confir-

mation of her faithlessness may be imagined. He did not dwell upon it. He simply and abruptly stated facts. The ring was not returned, 'probably,' he said, in the bitterness of his wounded feelings, 'because it was of value, and the picture was worthless to her.' He did not go to Ireland. Her falsehood seemed fully established, and it would have been torture to him to look again upon her face, and to meet his triumphant rival. His family took advantage of his reckless, despairing state, to urge his marriage with the lady of their own choice. He no longer cared to resist, and in a few weeks was united to her. Rash and fatal step! Had he not been so hasty, all might have been well in time.

"This letter was the last I ever received from my friend, and I never saw him again.

"I did not hear any more of Miss Lawrence till years afterwards, but, as I knew that

she had retired from the stage, I concluded that she was married to Verney. Whither he had taken her, however, I had no idea. Had I applied to my brother he could probably have informed me of Verney's whereabouts, but, unfortunately, my brother and I were not on good terms with each other at this time, in consequence of his reckless conduct, and the inveterate gambling habits he had contracted. Advice was thrown away upon him so long as Verney continued near to counteract it, and he could not be persuaded to separate himself from this evil counsellor, though he knew well that he was ruining him.

"During the next five years, nothing occurred that bears upon this narrative, but one day, at the end of that time, I had a visit from Edward Horton. He had not improved for the better since I had last seen him. His

eyes, always restless and wandering, were more so now than ever, and his dress was shabby. Altogether, he had the look of a man who was down upon his luck.

"He told me that he was seeking a tutorship, and asked me if I knew of any one who required his services. I did not, but I promised to recommend him in case I should hear. He then began to talk of other subjects, and lingered so long that I really thought he never meant to take leave. Yet it was not that he had become interested in the discussion of any topic. He seemed simply to talk for talk's sake, and as if for the purpose of filling up time, the ridiculous blunders he made plainly showing that his mind was engaged in quite another direction.

"His manner was flurried and nervous, and he kept constantly shifting his eyes about. I knew well, from old experience, that there

was something on his mind that he wanted to say, and, to give him the opportunity, purposely allowed pauses in the conversation. But he would only hem, and pull his gloves on and off, and when I thought he was just on the point of coming out with it, would utter some platitude.

"Thinking that he might find courage in a glass of wine to enable him to divulge this mysterious something, I rang for wine, but, though he swallowed five glasses, he remained timorous as before.

"At last, he stood up to go, and then, when his hand was on the handle of the door, out it came.

"'Had I heard,' he asked, 'of the shameful deceit Verney had practiced towards Graydon and Miss Lawrence, in order to prevent their marriage?'

"'No,' I exclaimed. 'What deceit? Sit down, my dear fellow.'

"He sat down. His hand was trembling, and he appeared greatly agitated.

"'What deceit?' I repeated, for he did not seem inclined to go on.

"'Well,' he continued, nervously stroking his hat, 'I heard it from a person who was employed by Verney to—to—from a person who, in short, he had used as a tool, and then cast aside when he had no further need of his services—ungratefully deserted and left in poverty—refused him even the loan of a paltry pound, insulting him by offering to pay his passage out to America, but not even trusting him with the money, lest he should spend it. And this man had perjured his soul for Verney's sake, involved himself in such a mass of lies and treachery, as must

drag him down—down—down to *hell.* Oh! it was shameful, wasn't it?'

"He spoke with great emotion, and his eyes were gleaming with feverish excitement. I thought, then, that it was the effect of the wine he had drunk. I did not know at that time that five or six glasses were no more to him than one or two would be to another man.

"'It was just what he deserved, and might have expected,' I replied. 'The devil always deserts his followers, sooner or later.'

"'Yes,' he murmured, 'I believe he is the devil. He entices one on with promises, and then, when he has gained his object, turns and laughs at one for having been so easily led.'

"I knew that Horton, like others far stronger than he was, had been drawn into gambling difficulties by Verney, and supposed that he was now alluding to this.

"'At any rate,' I said, 'if he is not just the devil himself, he is his son. But go on, you have not yet told me what this person confessed.'

"'No, well, I'm going. I don't know, of course, what his motives were for telling me. It might be that he had repented of the part he had taken in the affair, or it might be—'

"'It might be anything—who cares a rush what his motives were? Do go on.'

"But he seemed persistently anxious to settle this point before proceeding.

"'It seemed odd,' he continued, 'that he should make the confession he did, to me.'

"'Not in the least,' I again interrupted. 'What was there odd about it? He knew, I suppose, that you had been at college with Verney and Graydon.'

"This appeared to satisfy him.

"'Well,' he went on, 'I will tell you now

as quickly as possible what this man confessed to me. You know, I suppose, that Miss Lawrence is not married to Verney?'

"'Not married to Verney! Good God! can this be true? It is too good to be true.'

"'No; she is not yet married to him. But, unless you and I can prevent it, she will be.'

"'It must be prevented. It *shall* be prevented. Make haste, tell me all that you know.'

"'She may be already married to him,' he said, in a weak, helpless sort of tone.

"'No, no. Good Heavens! What makes you think that?'

"'It was in Dublin that I met this person I spoke of, and she was then going to be married at once.'

"'Idiot! and why on earth did you not *stop* it? Why not have gone to her and told

her what you had heard, instead of wasting time by coming to me? And when you do come, like a drivelling fool, you spend the time, that you admit to be so precious, talking about all manner of things, except the only thing of which you should talk. If you didn't like to go to her, why couldn't you write?'

"He fidgetted uneasily, but said nothing. I knew, however—because he feared lest the letter might by any chance fall into Verney's hands, or that he might hear who had written it, and thus incur his everlasting hatred and vengeance.

"'She may not be married yet,' he said.

"'May not! Well! But go on, go on, there has been delay enough. What did this man tell you? How long is it since you saw him?'

"'Two days.'

"'Two days! And when was she to be married?'

"'That I don't precisely know.'

"'Now go on.'

"He did go on, but so slowly and hesitatingly, that I felt very much inclined to take him by the collar and shake him, in order to make the words come quicker.

"'This person had been in Verney's pay for some time, and was employed by him to do various odd jobs of lying and treachery, which Verney considered it beneath him to do personally; and when Graydon went away to France, he employed him to disseminate the report of his marriage with Miss Lawrence, and to insert a paragraph in one or two papers announcing it.'

"'It was you who showed the paragraph to Graydon,' I interrupted, 'he told me so in a letter.'

"'Yes it was, but how could I know it was false? I saw it in the newspaper, why should I doubt its truth? And Graydon needn't have believed it if he didn't choose. I was not to blame—'

"'No, no, who said you were? And the picture, the miniature that was returned directed in Miss Lawrence's hand, what about it?'

"'It was stolen, also a letter of Miss Lawrence's to Graydon, the direction on the envelope of which was cut out, and fastened on the little packet.'

"'Base scoundrel! But his scheme didn't succeed, after all. Miss Lawrence is not his wife, and that is five years ago. I thought, on hearing that she had left the stage, that it was in consequence of her marriage.'

"'No; she left it soon after hearing the news of Graydon's faithlessness. You know she was not aware how he had been deceived.

From the time she heard of it, she drooped, and grew as pale as a lily, but more and more beautiful. Her spirits failed; she could not act, and gave up her engagement, supporting herself and mother in some other way. But her mother died a year ago, and she was left alone, without a living relation. Then Verney, who had been kind to her for his own purposes, renewed his importunities, and prevailed.'

"'He shall not prevail; she must be saved. Though this discovery has come too late to be of use to Graydon, though she may never be as happy as she might have been, she need not be miserable, as this marriage would assuredly make her. She has consented to it only for the sake of a home, or he is forcing her into it half against her will. He always had an extraordinary power over her, though she evidently feared and disliked him,

and she would not be able to resist. I shall write to her immediately, exposing his villainy. Or perhaps I ought to start for Ireland myself. But no, better write, at least in the first instance. What is her address?'

"'He handed me the address, which he had ready written on a slip of paper. I then gave him a hint to withdraw, wishing to be alone, that I might consider what I should say.

"The letter being written and despatched, I awaited with impatience the time when an answer could arrive, fearful lest the unhappy marriage might have taken place before its receipt.

"At the end of a week, not having got any reply, I started for Dublin, resolved to put an end to my suspense by calling at the house where Miss Lawrence resided, or had resided, and ascertaining the true state of the case.

"Immediately on arriving in Dublin, I went

there. On inquiring for Miss Lawrence, I was told that she had left two months ago.

"'And do you know where she now is?' I asked.

"'Yes, sir,' replied the woman. 'At least, I think so. They went to Brighton after remaining in London for a while; so unless they have left—'

"'They—who?'

"'Herself and her husband, sir.'

"'Husband! Oh, Heaven! too late,' I murmured.

"Though this news was what I had expected to hear, it burst upon me like a thunder-clap.

"'It was to be married, sir, she left this,' said the woman.

"'And to whom?' I asked, though feeling that the question was needless.

"'To a Mr. Verney, sir. He was coming

after her very constant for a long time; but I don't believe she'd ever have married him if her mother had lived. She'd never have consented to leave her, to be any gentleman's wife.'

"'A letter came for her a week ago. I suppose it is still lying here.'

"'No, sir; we sent it on after her. It did lie for two or three days, and then the mistress put it into an envelope directed to Mrs. Verney, and sent it on.'

"I walked away. Then, Horton had been under a mistake, and she had been already married when he met the person who disclosed to him Verney's deceit. So that, even if he had not delayed, but sought her himself at once, it would have still been too late.

"And the letter, exposing the villainy of the man who was her husband, had been sent to her. Was that well? Better, now that he

was so, that she should have remained in ignorance of it; the knowledge could but make her more unhappy.

"I shall now hasten to conclude this part of my narrative, in as few words as possible. The memories it recalls are too painful to dwell upon.

"I returned to England. A year after, I heard of Graydon's death. A dreadful railway accident had occurred in Ireland; he had been in the train, and was killed. The body was too fearfully mutilated to be recognisable. But his wife identified it by a pocket-book. A ring had also been found. Nobody recognised it; but I knew from the description, that it was the ring my unfortunate friend had given to Miss Lawrence. They must, then, have met, or how else could he have become possessed of it?

"I had not recovered from the shock of

Graydon's terrible death, when the news of Mrs. Verney's reached me. The place where it had occurred proved that my conjecture of their having met, had been correct; for it was to the train returning from that very place, that the accident had happened."

Having come to this point of Mr. Nugent's narrative, I thought it better to lay it aside for the present.

The dinner-bell had rung twice, and I feared a personal summons from old Donal. So, having locked it up in my writing-desk, I went down.

During dinner, I thought that Mr. Verney glanced suspiciously at me from time to time; but this might have been fancy.

In the evening, I resumed the perusal, and continued reading till I had finished.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. NUGENT'S NARRATIVE—CONTINUED.

"WHILE Verney had been plotting to destroy the happiness of Graydon and Miss Lawrence, he had had other work on hand—the ruin of my brother and of Melville.

"Through neglect and absence, my brother lost his estate. You have probably heard the story—how a dishonest steward took possession of Hazelgrove—how it was regained; then again lost, through my brother's imprudence, and how he died in a foreign land. His son—Cecil—was left unprovided for, and came to live with me.

"I should here mention, that Mrs. Graydon, my poor friend's widow, whose acquaintance I had made at the time of his death, had become my wife three years after that event.

"A second calamity had come upon her—the loss of all her fortune, through the failure of the company in whose hands it had been placed—and she was left almost destitute, with a son of about my nephew's age. The two boys, then, pursued their studies together, under the same tutor.

"I shall have occasion to return to this subject. Now, I pass on to speak of Melville.

"All his property was squandered away in gambling; and, at last, even the fortune of his wife, except the part which had been secured to her child, went in the same way. But her death produced a strong, and salutary effect upon him. His nature was generous.

and noble, though the passion for gambling had changed and perverted it for a time; and on the day she died, he solemnly vowed never again to handle a card or make a bet. This vow he kept. He separated himself from the companions who had been dragging him down, and set himself to work in earnest at his profession.

"His abilities were of no common order, and, in all likelihood, he would have risen rapidly, had he lived. But, at the early age of thirty-three, death called him away.

"I was sent for to his dying bed. I found him restless and disturbed. Something appeared to weigh on his mind. I begged him to confide in me, and at last he did. He told me that he owed a sum of money to Verney. It had been the object of his life, ever since giving up gambling, to pay this back, and

now he could not. He did not say for what purpose the money had been lent, but I suspected it to be a gambling debt. The sum, though large, yet did not amount to more than two-thirds of that now claimed by Verney. So that, even if the money were still owing, your entire fortune would not be required to pay it, as he asserts. But it is not owing, for I paid it, and can produce the receipt given me by Verney, if he continues to dispute the fact.

"The question of the debt being settled, finally, as we then thought, your father appeared relieved. But he requested me to send for Verney, as he wished to see him for the purpose of arranging a few other matters. I did so, and he arrived the following day.

"This was four years after the death of Mrs. Verney, and I had not seen him for

eight or nine years. But for his eyes, I should never have recognised him, he had become so altered and prematurely aged.

"They had a long interview alone. Then a lawyer was sent for, and two of the servants summoned, evidently to act as witnesses. It was plain, that a will was being drawn up.

"When the lawyer had gone, and Verney had retired, I went to your father. I found him feverish, and talking incoherently, as if he had been over excited. I instantly sent for the doctor. He could do little, however. An opiate was administered, but without producing any effect. Soon after, he sank into a state of unconsciousness, from which he never roused. His death occurred next day.

"When the will was read, nothing could exceed my surprise on hearing that he had appointed Verney the guardian of his child.

I had thought that it was his intention to name myself, for, when talking with me before Verney's arrival, he had asked if I would have any objection to undertake such a responsibility, and I had expressed myself as perfectly willing to accept it.

"Plainly, Verney had influenced him to make this change. But wherefore? Why should a man of his character be anxious to burden himself with the charge of a child of six years old? It was my opinion, and is still, that Verney was not aware of the strict manner in which your fortune was secured, and hoped to make his office of guardian a profitable one.

"As for the letter purporting to be written by your father, I believe it to be a forgery. At college, Verney was famous for his skill in imitating handwriting. It is impossible that it could be genuine. Your father knew that

the debt was paid. It had been paid in his presence. The only way one can imagine it written by him is by supposing that he was not in his right senses at the time. Possessed of them, he would never have made such an unholy compact. But I do not think it probable, or even possible, that Verney could then have had any idea of the scheme he has now unfolded. I believe that it was a sudden thought, suggested by some immediate and pressing demand for money; and I have my suspicions as to the nature of this demand. Another reason for my believing the letter to be forged is, that I know your father had very different views for your future settlement—that, in fact, it was his wish, if all should go well, and the parties principally concerned be agreeable, that his child should be united to the son of my brother—to my

nephew. This he expressed in the last conversation I ever had with him."

Here I laid down the manuscript, feeling too disturbed to proceed at once.

"How strange!" I murmured. "But the real wish of my father is as impossible of fulfilment as the other. Yes, quite, quite." I rose, and walked several times up and down the room. "I wish Mr. Nugent had not told me this," I said, half aloud. "But why need I discompose myself? I will be calm, I will be rational."

After a few minutes, I compelled myself to resume my reading, and sitting down again, continued—

"It is time now to turn to my stepson and Cecil. Their tutor was no other than Edward Horton. I was then living in Dublin, and he had called on me soon after Cecil's arrival,

just as I was seeking an instructor for the boys. Horton told me that he had just left a situation in the country, as he wished to obtain one in town. The testimonials he showed me were excellent, and I knew, myself, that he was a good Greek and Latin scholar. So I engaged him. I had never much liked the man, but the fact of his having been my companion at college, and having belonged, at least partly, to the same set, established a sort of claim. Besides, I knew nothing against his character; weakness and indecision were not crimes, and I could not charge him with anything worse.

"Yet, I cannot help reproaching myself that I engaged him, for he was the cause of great mischief in my family.

"Charles Graydon, my stepson, though clever and handsome, was not like his father in disposition. He was arrogant and over-

bearing, Cecil, proud and high spirited, and the boys never agreed. The tutor encouraged emulation between them, and favoured Charles. The studies of Cecil were hindered, so as to make him appear less clever than he really was. Of course I did not know of this, or I would soon have put a stop to it. But I afterwards discovered that there had been a regular cabal formed against him, consisting of Horton, Charles, and—it is unpleasant to have to write it, but I must—and my wife. She perceived that I loved Cecil better than her son, and, fearing that I would leave my property to him instead of to Charles, tried to keep him back in his studies, for the purpose of getting him into disfavour with me. The scheme was, to force my nephew to leave the house by, in every small way—and large whenever possible—making his position as galling and unpleasant as it could be made.

They had hit on the right plan for their purpose. Cecil quietly frustrated all the schemes to hinder his studies, but his spirit rose against the constant affronts to which he was subjected, and the taunting speeches of his cousin. I, at length, began to suspect that my nephew was unjustly treated; but Cecil was too proud to complain, and it was not till he quitted my house that I knew the treatment he had received.

"He left a note, thanking me, but saying that he would not be a burden on me any longer, that he was resolved to work his own way in the world, and had gone to America, having got a free passage in return for his services on board.

"Having read this note, I instantly sent for Horton and Charles, and, after a great deal of questioning, the whole truth came out. Horton, though deceitful, never could keep a

secret when closely interrogated, and, as he saw that the game was up, he probably did not much care to do so. It was his plan, now, to appease my anger, if possible; and this, he thought, could be best done by a confession. In the course of it, however, a great deal that was highly disadvantageous to himself, oozed out, and Charles—who had at first roundly denied all knowledge of why his cousin had left—indignant with his tutor for confessing, fully exposed his unprincipled conduct—all his meanness, deceit, and vices, of which last I could not but think he appeared himself to know too much, for one who had never shared in them. By further questioning, I discovered that Horton had been in the habit of bringing his pupil to music saloons, and other low places of entertainment, and he had also taught him to drink and gamble.

"Horton had attempted to corrupt Cecil in the same manner, but had found there very different material to work upon. The fixed determination of regaining his father's property—which even then, young as he was—Cecil had set before him as a life purpose—was a safeguard against temptation. When dying, my brother had charged his son to make it his ambition to get back the estate of his ancestors. Such a charge was just the one to make a strong impression on a mind like my nephew's, and to fulfil it, became from that hour a cherished project with him, and a motive power for study and exertion. I had not known how deep a root this project had taken in his mind, and, fearing that it could never be realised, witnesses having disappeared and important documents being lost—I had discouraged him. The idea, I thought, would but prevent him from settling

his mind to any pursuit, and his life would be wasted in fruitless dreaming. I was wrong, however; it was this purpose which, furnishing him, as it did, with a strong motive for exertion, enabled him to succeed.

"Of course, after the disclosures I had heard, Horton did not leave the room without first having received notice that his engagement was at an end, and, completely disgusted with the scheming which had gone on, I said plainly, that Charles should never inherit a penny of my money.

"Horton departed, but so did not the mischief and unhappiness which he had brought into my family. The matter was the cause of a separation between Mrs. Nugent and myself. You will understand that this must be a painful subject, and therefore excuse me from saying much about it. We had never been suited to each other, and this

affair brought about an open rupture. We both agreed that it was better to part. I did so very, very sadly. In becoming united to her, I had hoped, at least, for a peaceful home, if not a specially happy one.

"This stroke, though indirectly, had come through Verney. He it was that had corrupted Horton, who, in all likelihood, had he never met with Verney, would have passed harmlessly through life. What a blaster of happiness that man was, and is! How numerous his victims! Graydon, Miss Lawrence, your father, my brother, Horton. How many others, I do not know. Contact with him appears to bring certain destruction. None escape unscathed who come beneath the glance of his evil eye. Some are ruined only for this life, some, it may be, for eternity. The atmosphere that surrounds him seems poisoned, and those who enter it bring away

some of the poison, wherewith to destroy others. In this way, how many his victims may be, who can tell?

"Charles Graydon, corrupted by his evil tutor, went on from bad to worse. He took to no profession, but lived upon his mother, spending nearly all the large income I allowed her, in betting and dissipation. I tried various plans for his settlement in life, but he did no good in anything. His talents were all on the surface; he was brilliant, dashing, but he had no depth, no perseverance, no steadfastness of purpose. He was a lover of pleasure. At length, I gave him up as incorrigible; it was useless to assist him. Then, I saw nothing of him for some years; but occasionally I heard his name, and it was always in some discreditable connection. When the death of his mother occurred, it was a great loss to him, depriving him, as it did, of the

use of her income. From that time he seems to live upon his wits, and spends most of his time abroad.

"I heard nothing of my nephew for eight or nine years, and then it was through others, and the newspapers. He had commenced the lawsuit for the recovery of the family property. But, though in the same city, he did not come to see me. I could not help feeling hurt at this estrangement, so undeserved on my part.

"Between the time of my nephew's departure, and the period of which I now begin to write, there has elapsed the space of twelve years. The commencement of this second part of my narrative dates from last autumn, and brings events up to the present time, where I must stop abruptly, the conclusion being yet hidden in the future.

"One day, I happened to meet a friend

whom I had not seen for some time, a Mr. Connolly. He was also a friend of my nephew. I took him home to dine with me. In the course of conversation during the evening, Mr. Connolly mentioned that he had lately met my nephew. I had never ceased to take a warm interest in Cecil, and, on hearing this, asked Mr. Connolly several questions about him, expressing regret at the estrangement which existed between us.

"'Why, this is very strange,' said Mr. Connolly, 'the very last evening I passed with your nephew, he was speaking of you just in the same spirit as you have now spoken of him, and also regretted the alienation that had arisen.'

"'Why,' I exclaimed, 'it is his own fault. I was never alienated from him, but he was probably led to believe so in the past.'

"'Come then," said Mr. Connolly, 'the

mistake, though of long standing, can be set right in less than quarter of an hour. Your nephew is at present in Dublin. Let me bring you to the hotel where he is stopping.'

"I very willingly complied, and we instantly started. Mr. Connolly was right. Before a quarter of an hour had passed, the misunderstanding of twelve years had become but a memory. We spent a very pleasant evening together, Cecil, I, and Mr. Connolly, who had so quickly brought about this happy reunion.

"After this, I saw a good deal of my nephew, for he remained in Dublin, which rather surprised me, as I knew that he never liked to be absent from Hazelgrove longer than was absolutely necessary, and no particular business appeared to prevent him from returning. Another thing puzzled, and also pained me, the heavy cloud which so often

rested upon his brow, giving to his face a more than usually proud expression. He appeared depressed and unhappy, and whatever was the reason of this, seemed also to be the cause of his not returning to Hazelgrove. Sometimes he spoke of travelling for a short time. A little while before my meeting with him, I had heard a report that he was engaged to be married, and, thinking that some disappointment might have occurred, I one day ventured to ask if the report I had heard were true. He did not answer for a moment, then, shortly, and in a tone which effectually forbade any continuance of the subject, he replied—

"'No, he was not engaged to any lady!'

"I pass on till within a month of the present time, when one evening, Cecil and I, accompanied by Mr. Connolly, went to the theatre. The curtain had risen when we

entered, and the house being rather crowded, we stood near the door.

"From the moment of coming in, I had noticed in one of the boxes at a little distance, a young man, whose appearance seemed familiar to me; but, being unable to see his face fully, I could not satisfy myself as to his identity, and kept watching to see if he would turn round. When the curtain dropped at the conclusion of the act, he did so, and then, to my surprise, though I had had a suspicion all through, I recognised my step-son. 'Why it's Charles,' I cried. At the same instant, my nephew, whose eyes, I then perceived, had also been fixed upon the young man, exclaimed—

"'Good God! It's Mr. Percival."

"'What do you mean?" I asked, but, at that moment, Charles stood up to leave the

theatre, and, at the same time, Cecil moved towards the door.

"'I must speak to that person,' he said.

"Mr. Connolly and I followed. The young man came downstairs, humming an air, in the middle of which he abrubtly stopped, looking somewhat put out, on perceiving his cousin standing waiting for him, and, still more so, when his eye fell upon me.

"'I wish to have a few words with you,' said Cecil, advancing.

"'Deuce take you!' muttered his cousin, then aloud, and in an imperious tone, 'I can't stop now, I'm in a hurry, and you can have no business with me,' saying which he was about to pass on, when Cecil quickly planted himself in the passage, stretching out his arms to bar it across. At the same moment, Mr. Connolly, perceiving a motion

on Charles' part to return to the theatre, barred up the way thither, in like manner, and the young man stood between them, a prisoner. At first he appeared to meditate forcing his way through, but, after a glance at the granite chest of Mr. Connolly opposed to him on one side, and the stern, determined face of Cecil on the other, he seemed to abandon the intention, and, bursting into a careless laugh, said—

"'Well, gentlemen, what is your pleasure, since it seems I am your prisoner?'

"'I did not know till just now,' said Cecil, speaking in a tone of suppressed anger and indignation, 'that it was to my cousin I was indebted for the deepest injuries that one man can do another. I did not know till a moment since, that it was my cousin who came, under a false name, like a sneak, to endeavour to corrupt my tenantry—with

what base motive I know not, unless it were merely to gratify the hatred he always bore me; but let that pass, my tenantry were incorruptible, you abandoned the task and it is not to call you to account for this that I speak, but for the deeper injury that you succeeded in doing me. It was you that stole from me the affections of the woman who was my affianced bride.'

"Charles uttered a long, low whistle—

"'Oh, is that it?'

"'Yes,' returned Cecil, 'and you shall not stir from this spot till you have given clear and distinct answers to the questions I am about to ask you. First, is Miss Verney your wife?'

"'Oh, Lord, no!' ejaculated Charles.

"At this answer, the face of Cecil grew sterner than before.

"'What have you done with her, then?' he demanded.

"'I? Nothing.'

"'You have. Where is she? You do not pass till you have answered that question.'

"'Then,' returned the young man, with a mocking laugh, 'I'd advise you to tell the box-keeper to bring chairs here, and I shall light my cigar, as I perceive I shall have to wait for my freedom till the people begin to come out;' saying this, he struck a match, but, before he could apply it to his cigar, Cecil dashed it and the box from his hand, scattering the contents on the ground.

"'This trifling will not avail you,' he said, evidently terribly in earnest, and bending his sternly flashing eyes upon his cousin's face. 'Answer my question. Where is Miss Verney?'

"The young man quailed beneath his glance.

"'Upon my honour, I don't know,' he exclaimed.

"'Your honour!' retorted Cecil, scornfully, 'use some other phrase.'

"'I declare to you, upon my life, I don't know,' said Charles. 'If you keep me standing here till doomsday, I can give you no other answer.'

"'But you took her away from her home, you can't deny that.'

"'I can, and do. I did not even know till this moment that she had left it. Why do you fix upon me? There are others—'

"'There are no others. I saw you when you did not think you were seen. I know all about your conduct. It is useless for you to say to me that you did not take her away.

If you don't know where she is now, at least I insist upon you telling me what you do know of her.'

"'I swear by all that's sacred I know nothing whatever about Miss Verney. The little minx treated me as badly as she did you; took presents from me, and then, one fine day, parted from me, with promises of meeting me on the morrow, and from that hour till this, I have never seen or heard more of her. I don't know, however, after all, that this was quite her own fault; but her old tyrant of a father, of whom she seemed to stand in mortal fear, hated me like poison —I don't rightly know for what reason— and the night of the day I had parted with Catherine—'

"'With Miss Verney,' interrupted Cecil, frowning.

"'The night of that day, he sent his old

man to me with the ring I had given her, to ask how I had become possessed of it. As there was no need for concealment, I told him that it had been my father's; after his death had become my mother's property, and so descended to me. He then asked me several other questions, some of which I answered, and wound up by delivering a message from the old chap, his master, that—that, in fact, I'd better make myself scarce, which I accordingly did the next day, the game clearly being up, and the place uncommonly dreary.'

"'Then you solemnly declare before God, that you know nothing of Miss Verney?' said Cecil.

"'I do, most assuredly.'

"Cecil looked at him steadily and searchingly for a few moments, then, stepping aside—

"'You may pass,' he said.

"The young man took instant advantage of his freedom, and, bowing with an affectation of great politeness, disappeared.

"Mr. Connolly and I had remained silent throughout, mystified witnesses of this scene. I had heard, with a chill, the name of Verney mentioned by Charles and my nephew. Could it be *his* daughter of whom they had been speaking? I knew he had a daughter.

"The explanation which Cecil gave, as we walked along, of what had just taken place, proved that such was indeed the fact. I could not but feel glad that anything had occurred to break off his marriage with the daughter of Verney, of whose former connection with his father, Cecil had been totally ignorant till I informed him of it.

"Yet, it was impossible for me not to take a deep interest in the fate of Miss Verney, for was she not also the child of her whom

none that had ever seen could cease to remember?

"Where could she be? What had become of her? These were the questions on which we tried, but vainly, to come to some conclusion. Mr. Connolly was at first inclined to think that Charles had not spoken the truth. But this was not my opinion. I knew my stepson's character too well, and his hatred of his cousin—increased as this had been by Cecil's good fortune in regaining his estate, and his having risen so far above himself in the world—not to be aware that if Charles had really induced Miss Verney to elope with him, he would have been only too glad to admit it, in order to triumph over Cecil. Indeed, it was, and is, my belief that he had tried this other means of being revenged on Cecil, when his project of corrupting the tenantry had failed.

"Before, however, instituting inquiries about the unaccountable flight of the young lady, it would be right to acquaint Mr. Verney with Charles' denial of any knowledge of his daughter, and accordingly, that same night, Cecil wrote to him, informing him of his encounter with Charles, and what he had said."

That must have been the note, I broke off to think, which Mr. Verney received, and read with such a strange expression of countenance, two mornings after I had written the first letter to Cecil, which was never sent, and was expecting a reply.

"A few days after, my nephew called and showed me the answer which he had just got from Mr. Verney. It was an extraordinary production. Instead of entering into Cecil's plans for seeking Miss Verney, he seemed desirous to hinder them, and to wish that no search for her should be instituted.

"He said that it would be quite useless to attempt anything of the sort after the lapse of so many months. He contradicted himself strangely, at one moment, saying that he was sure she must be dead, at another, that he was quite confident she was with Charles. At the end, a few studied and conventional words of regret were introduced, plainly for the purpose of saving appearances.

"Having read this letter over two or three times, the conclusion to which I came was, *that Mr. Verney knew something about his daughter.* On hinting this opinion to Cecil, I found that he had already come to the same. And the fact that all our efforts towards discovering Miss Verney have proved fruitless, confirms me in this idea. But I am not hopeless of finding her yet, for, in consequence of what I am now going to write, I have reason to think that there is a

day of reckoning approaching for Verney—and that speedily—when all may be made clear.

"I shall now relate what remains, as briefly as possible.

"One evening, when Cecil was with me, a servant entered to say that a person wanted to see me.

"'Show him in,' I said. Whereupon, in walked Horton.

"This was no great surprise to me, for, though I had not seen Horton for a long time after parting with him, of late years he had begun to call upon me occasionally. The first time he had come apparently in a state of great distress, and asked for a loan of five shillings; he had not a penny for food, he said.

"Though aware that the money was more likely to be spent on drink than on food, I *had* given it to him, and, from that time, he

had continued to call occasionally, for the purpose of soliciting trifling loans, which, I need scarcely mention, were never repaid.

"It was some months now, however, since I had seen him, and he was so respectably dressed that, at the first glance, I thought he must have become reformed; but a second showed me this was not the case.

"His step was feeble and uncertain as ever, more so, indeed, and his bleared and bloodshot eyes had a wild, restless look, like those of a person threatened with *delirium tremens*. It was plain he was fast sinking into a drunkard's grave.

"When he entered, Cecil was standing at the other end of the room, and did not immediately turn round. The moment he did so, however, and that his eyes fell upon Horton, he exclaimed in a tone of surprise, 'Edward Lloyd, the Man of the Wreck!'

"Of course, these words were quite incomprehensibe to me; but they did not seem to be so to Horton. He grew pale as ashes, and, shrinking away, would have edged out of the room, had I not prevented him by closing the door.

"'This is Mr. Horton, your former tutor, I said to Cecil.

"'Then he and Lloyd are one and the same person,' returned Cecil.

"'And who is Lloyd?' I inquired.

"'He was one of the passengers in a vessel that was wrecked on the Western coast, last spring,' replied my nephew.

"'What do you say, Horton?' I said, turning to him. 'Is that a mistake?'

"'No; it's the truth—it's the truth,' he muttered.

"'And why did you assume another name?' asked Cecil.

"'Because I didn't want you to know who I was. I recognised you from the first moment. Though you were a boy when I had seen you last, you were less changed than I,' he added, with a groan.

"It was the fact. No one who had not seen Horton for twelve years, could have recognised him in this broken-down, degraded-looking creature.

"No more was said on the subject, and Horton, who seemed very ill at ease, soon took his departure.

"'Did you call for any purpose?' I said to him, when we were in the hall; for I fancied from his manner, that he had.

"'Yes—no—that is, not exactly—no, not at all—it will do another time,' he answered, in great confusion, and, making a dart at the door-handle, began to turn it round every way but the right way.

"'Because if you have,' I said, coming to his assistance, 'speak out.'

"He made no reply, but looked at me with a miserable expression of countenance, and hurried off as fast as his trembling legs would carry him.

"I felt certain that he had called with the intention of asking or revealing something. It could not have been to ask for money, for his dress showed that he was in no want of that. Besides, he never had much hesitation about making such requests.

"A week after this visit of Horton, one night, about eleven o'clock, as I was sitting alone, reading, the stillness of the house was suddenly disturbed by a hasty knock at the street-door, and, the next moment, a servant entered, and delivered me a note. It was not enclosed in any envelope, and, on unfolding it, I read these words, written in pencil, and

scarcely legible, in consequence of some of the letters being left out—

"'Come to me immediately, for God's sake. I am dying, and there is something I must reveal to you. Don't delay a moment.

'E. H.'

"I knew at once from whom the summons came, and instantly seizing my hat, ran downstairs. The messenger who had brought it was waiting in the hall, to conduct me to Horton's lodging.

"While we walked there, I asked him a few questions. Horton, it appeared, had been attacked with *delirium tremens*, two days before. It was the second time, and the doctor gave no hope of his recovery. He was not delirious at present, the lad said, and had not been so for the last few hours; but this was considered only the precursor of his death.

"On entering the room where the unfor-

tunate man lay, I found him sitting propped up in bed, a ghastly figure, his inflamed eyeballs rolling restlessly from side to side, his lips black and parched looking, and on his changed countenance, the awful and unmistakable stamp of death.

"On a little table beside the bed, stood some medicine bottles, a glass, and a lemon. But there was no one with the dying man to soothe his last agony. Alone, he had been left to battle with it. The room was littered and untidy. Papers, and articles of clothing, lay scattered about the floor; the clothes on the bed were rumpled, and some of them cast aside altogether by the feverish tossing of the patient; and there was no gentle, woman's hand near to replace them, or to shake up the disarranged, uncomfortable looking pillows.

"I did what I could for him, and brought water to moisten his dry lips; but he turned away from it, crying out for brandy, and, having found a bottle containing some, on a shelf, I put a little into the water, and gave it to the unhappy man. This appeared to refresh him, and he began to speak.

"'I sent for you, Mr. Nugent,' he said, speaking in a hollow, unnatural voice, 'because there is something weighing on my mind, which I must unburden it of before I die.' He shuddered as he uttered the word, and shrank back, trembling, among the pillows, as if he were afraid of himself, and would slink away if he could. 'Die,' he repeated, in a tone of such horror and shrinking dread as I had never heard, 'die, for I feel that I shan't outlive the night, and *they* would reproach me if I let that man go un-

punished. I must be quick, my time is short. Graydon—you, and everybody, thought he was killed in a railway accident. Well, he wasn't, I know better; he was—he was—murdered.'

"'Gracious Heavens!' I cried, starting up from my seat at the bedside. 'Who murdered him? Quick, speak; was it—'

"'Hush, hush,' gasped Horton, in a hoarse whisper, and raising himself up in the bed, while he stared with starting eyeballs towards one particular corner of the room. 'He's there—look! don't you see him? He's watching us. Do you know what he is waiting for? I'll tell you—stoop down—I don't want him to hear—my soul—my soul that he has murdered.'

"I saw that I had committed a mistake in allowing my agitation to appear; it had excited Horton. At any price, I must try to seem calm. It was with great difficulty that

at last I succeeded in soothing the wretched man; for a long time he mumbled and muttered incoherently about the figure in the corner that was watching us, and entreated me to speak low. But at length the excitement passed, and he became tolerably quiet.

"'Did I say Graydon was murdered?' he asked, weakly, but in a calm tone. 'I shouldn't have said that; I did not mean to say it. I didn't see it done; but this I know, that he was not in the train to which the accident happened, and that the body supposed to be his, was not his. Verney was in London just before it occurred. I met him there. I was desperately in want of money at the time, and applied to him; but he wouldn't give me a penny—not a penny. When he left, to return to Ireland, I followed him, for the purpose of making one last demand.'

"'But what claim had you upon Verney?" I asked.

"'Oh, dear! I forgot you don't know,' he answered, groaning. 'I deceived you on this subject, as well as afterwards about your nephew. Do you remember one day, more than twenty years ago, when I came to you, and told you that I had discovered Verney's treachery towards Graydon and Miss Lawrence, that I had heard of it from the person he had employed to assist him in carrying out the deception. Well, that was a lying story. It was I who, was Verney's accomplice and tool. It was I who by his command, stole the picture from Miss Lawrence, and sent it to Graydon. It was I who, acting under his orders, spread the report of her marriage to Verney, though I knew it to be a lie as black as the pit that is opening to receive me. And why, do you think, I did all this? For what

did I sell myself, body and soul? For a little money, that was soon spent. Yes,' he continued, bitterly, 'in spite of his promises, all he ever did was to give me a few paltry pounds, and obtain for me a situation on the continent, and even this much was done to serve his own ends, that I might meet Graydon, and make sure that the deception was working as it should, and to get me away. For this, I sold to misery, her whom I loved—for I did love her; and that, though you may think it ought to have prevented me, was one reason why I joined so readily with Verney. I could not bear that she and Graydon should be married, and live happily together, loving each other, and since it was impossible that she could ever be anything to me, I preferred that she should be the wife of Verney, whom she could not love.'

"'Go on, go on,' I interrupted, fearful lest

this disclosure of his own selfishness and baseness, should make me feel less charitably towards the dying man than I should.

"'Will you forgive me?' he said, perceiving perhaps by my countenance the thoughts that were passing in my mind. 'There will be enough to accuse me without you. Won't you forgive me?' The words were spoken more in a cowardly whine than a tone of genuine repentance.

"'I have nothing to forgive in the matter,' I answered, 'those whom you injured are dead.'

"'Yes, yes, I know,' he murmured, 'though I see her reproachful eyes before me for ever, and his pale, stern face. How shall I meet them?' He stared wildly round, and, fearing that his senses were again about to wander, I said to recall him, and also in the hope of soothing—

"'But when you came to me, you were anxious to remedy the evil you had done. You would have saved Miss Lawrence, then.'

"'No, no,' he groaned, 'I knew then that she was already Verney's wife. I told you she was not, only because I knew you wouldn't have written if you had heard the truth, lest you should make her more unhappy. But I thought only of revenge, revenge on Verney. He had deserted me; refused to give me money, and insulted me; and I wanted to make her hate and loathe him—perhaps cause her to leave him. I was afraid to write myself, lest Verney should see the letter, and recognize my handwriting, and that was why I came to you.

"'Now you know what claim I had on Verney. Of course I felt that I had not much right to apply to him again, after having got that letter sent, but he didn't know

that I had anything to do with it, or ever suspected me. Clever as he was, you see, I managed to delude him about that,' he added, with a ghastly smile, which was chased by a sudden convulsion.

"'Brandy, brandy,' he gasped, 'give me brandy, or I swear I will not utter another word, and what I have to reveal shall die with me. Brandy, for the love of Heaven, and don't add water to it, it's weak enough as it is.'

"I gave him a little, but he grumbled at the small quantity. 'And you did put water,' he said, reproachfully, when he had drunk it off.

"I had not added a drop of water, but the strongest spirit would have seemed weak to him now.

"He remained for several minutes with closed eyes. I thought he was falling asleep,

but suddenly he opened them, and began speaking very rapidly, as if afraid he would not have time to say what he wanted, but pausing between every sentence to gasp for breath.

" 'I followed Verney to Ireland—I knew Graydon had gone there—I don't know whether Verney knew; he may, and perhaps it was hearing that, caused him to leave London so suddenly. I meant to have gone to him the first evening of my arrival, but put it off till next day. I preferred that it should be daylight when I went. In the morning, as I was walking on the sea shore, hesitating whether, after all, I would go to Verney or not, my eye was suddenly caught by something glittering in the sun, among the rocks above me. At first I thought it might be a piece of flinty rock, which had broken off, but the manner in which it flashed back

the sun, showed me it could not be that. I climbed to the spot where I saw it, and then, to my astonishment, picked up a ring, and you may imagine how much my surprise was increased, when, after a glance, I recognised the identical ring which Graydon had given Miss Lawrence at parting from her. While still holding it in my hand, not knowing how to account for its appearance there, my eye fell upon a pocket-book, lying about a stone's throw beneath. I made my way to the spot, and picked it up. On opening it, I found it contained papers which proved it to be the property of Graydon. I did not know what to think, but at length I decided that Graydon must have been walking here the previous night, or earlier that morning, and dropped them. The ring was my property now, however, I thought. I had found it, and I *was* far too badly off for money to think of

seeking Graydon to return it. There happened to be a jeweller in the neighbourhood. I sold the ring to him, and also the pocket-book, out of which I forgot previously to take the papers. The jeweller left by the next train, the train to which the accident happened, and his was the body which, on account of the pocket-book being found on it, was supposed to be that of Graydon.' He paused for some minutes, then continued—

"'I made secret inquiries about Graydon, but all were of no avail. I had good cause for the darkest of suspicions. I might have had Verney arrested if I had chosen, but I did not. I was afraid of becoming compromised myself, so many things would ooze out if there were a trial. I could, too, have applied to Verney for money on this ground, but I did not then—I left the place at once, and would never have gone near it again of

my own accord, but, nineteen years after, Fate cast the vessel in which I was a passenger on that very coast, where, but for your nephew, we might all have perished. I did not know what coast it was, it might have been that of some place in Scotland, for all I knew. I was so terrified by the storm, I didn't mind anything, and when, on landing, I saw among the crowd of pale faces on the shore, that of Verney's daughter, I thought it was her mother, and that I was already in the other world, and she was waiting to accuse me. I lingered in the neighbourhood for a while. I determined to make use of the knowledge I had—why should I not make it profitable to me? Why should I be poor and miserable, when I could have money for the asking? Verney would not dare to refuse me now, though he could formerly twist me round his *finger* whatever way he chose, like a thread

of silk—just like a thread of silk, I was no better able to resist. But I had now got a power over him. He would be afraid of me, as well as I of him. Yet he was not a thousandth part as much afraid, I think, for, though it was he who was in reality in my power, I always felt like a worm beneath his feet, so weak and helpless.

"'I did not tell him about finding the ring and pocket-book. I did not say why I suspected him. All I told him was, that I knew the body, which had been supposed to be Graydon's, was not—that I could prove it, and would, if he refused to pay me for being silent. He did give me money, but from the moment I touched it, my torments were increased twofold, and I began bitterly to regret that I had ever gone to him, or let him know that I had any suspicions—for I never felt as if my life were safe for an instant, and

existed in hourly dread lest he might have me assassinated. I could not hear a footstep behind me in the street at night, without thinking it was that of a murderer, and if a person in passing lingered beside me for a moment, I trembled lest he might be about to plunge a dagger into my side. But Verney knew well, no doubt, that there was no need for him to trouble himself about getting rid of me. He knew that when he gave me money, he gave me a sure and certain means of assassinating myself. From the time I began to receive it, I did nothing but drink, drink, drink; partly to drown the thought that it was hush money I was taking, partly to drive away the continually haunting fears I have mentioned.'

"He ceased speaking, completely exhausted, and snatched convulsively at the bed clothes. I thought he was actually dying. After about

the lapse of ten minutes, however, he spoke again, but in a very faint, low voice—

"'I don't know whether what I have told you is sufficient for Verney's arrest. If I could come forward as a witness, it might, though, after all, the evidence is only circumstantial. But there is a person who, I suspect, knows a great deal more than I do, who has, perhaps, witnessed the crime—'

"'Who is he?' I asked, for Horton had again paused.

"'Stoop down, and I'll tell you,' he whispered.

"I did so, but, at that moment, a strange spasm passed over his features, the drops of perspiration started to his forehead, and, grasping my arm with a tight convulsive hold, while he struck out wildly with his other hand as if to ward something off, he screamed in a shrill, unnatural voice—

"'Not yet, not yet—go away—a few minutes longer, only a few minutes.' Then, grasping my arm yet tighter, and shrinking half behind me, while his face expressed such ghastly horror and fear as I can never forget as long as I live, he gasped out, 'The room is full of them—and all pointing and mocking at me—I can't breathe, they press upon me so closely—I am suffocating—keep off—keep off,' and flinging out both his arms desperately, he beat upon the air, while a volley of fearful oaths, mingled with prayers, burst from his lips.

"I need not describe the scene further. All night his ravings continued. At one moment he was shrieking curses, at the next, uttering the most abject prayers and supplications for mercy. It was a fearful watch to keep; each hour seemed like three ordinary ones. I had stood by many death beds, I grieve to think how many, but never before

by one like this. I had seen the soul, in doubt and darkness, reluctantly taking leave for ever of its mortal tenement, and looking back sorrowfully to earth—I had seen anguish on dying faces, as parents gazed their last on helpless infant children—and heard sad words of farewell uttered by dying lips of loved and loving ones, ere entering alone on the unknown journey before them. But never till that night had I stood by

> "'The sick and ghastly bed
> Of Sin delirious with its dread.'

"It was near morning when he died, and the first faint dawn of day was beginning to creep into the room, as if half reluctant to enter such a scene of horror. When all was over, I went quietly downstairs, murmuring a prayer—I hope it was not unorthodox to do so—for the sinful soul that had just departed.

"In consequence of the revelation that Horton had made, and his having died without mentioning the name of the person whom he thought had it in his power to give further information, I inserted an advertisement in several papers, offering a reward to any one who could throw some light on the mysterious disappearance of Graydon, nineteen years ago. The advertisement has appeared two or three times, and as yet with no result. The affair is, however, in the hands of a lawyer, but I fear that, unless more information can be obtained, the evidence we have—though convincing to me, knowing Verney, as I do—is not sufficiently strong and clear to criminate him, especially as so many years have elapsed since the thing occurred. All that can be done, however, shall be done to bring Verney to justice."

Here the manuscript ended.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNFORESEEN OBSTACLE.

NEXT morning, I felt glad to reflect that this day was the last I should spend at Verney Court. To-morrow I would be far away from the baleful eyes whose glance, whether in love or hate, had blasted alike, never to meet their cruel, devouring glare any more.

Mrs. Baker was to go with me. Our arrangements for leaving had to be conducted with great caution and secrecy, lest Mr. Verney or Donal should suspect, and any attempt be made to hinder our departure.

I wished that the hours, till I had fairly set

out, could become a blank; for there was a feverish anxiety upon me, and a feeling of dread, as if something were going to happen. The air seemed to me to be heavy with it. I suppose others may have had this feeling, at times. I had had it once or twice before in my life, in a minor degree, and have had since, and in no case have I ever afterwards found that it had been without cause. I could not bring myself to realise that the trouble, and suspense, and terror, in which I had existed for so long, was to end upon the morrow, though I felt that a change was at hand, that things were not to go on any longer in the way they had been.

Mr. Nugent's narrative had given me many subjects for reflection. I could not doubt that Mr. Verney was indeed the murderer of Graydon. I had more reasons for being *certain* on this point than Mr. Nugent had,

having heard the housekeeper's story, the facts of which I intended to relate to him.

But my mind was most occupied with thinking of Catherine. If she had escaped, as I could not doubt, with the intention of eloping with Charles Graydon, she had found him gone. What, then, had she done? I was inclined to think that she was wandering about somewhere, or perhaps, horrible thought! perhaps, in a fit of despair, had committed suicide. It was what she might do under such circumstances, alone, and not knowing where to go, yet unwilling to return to captivity.

This dark fear haunted me all day, walking, side by side, with the undefined feeling of dread that I have mentioned. Though Catherine had often teased me and made me unhappy by her mischievous tricks and speeches, though she had disgusted me by her frivolity

and double-dealing, I now admitted those excuses for her conduct, which I had formerly scorned.

She was so untrained, had so little conception of what was right or wrong, was so thoughtless, so impulsive. Even about her very deceit there had been something almost innocent and childish. It had always seemed as if she were only acting according to her nature and instinct, and could not do otherwise. She was such a strange, inconsistent being, that it seemed unjust to judge her by the same standard as others, and hold her equally responsible.

I spent the earlier part of this day, which was to be my last at Verney Court, in packing and making arrangements for my journey.

When all were completed, I went out, for the purpose of taking leave of some of my

friends among the peasantry, poor Alley O'Reilly, Bill Malone—who had so faithfully managed the matter of the letter for me—and a few others. Also to visit some favourite spots, and take farewell of the grand and noble scenery that I thought I should never see again.

Though glad to leave Verney Court, I was not so to leave the West. From the first, my heart had warmed towards its imaginative, untaught children, who, like their own land, are capable of being made so much more of. From the first, I had felt myself drawn towards the country, and now I loved its bold brown mountains and far-spread desolate heaths, with a passionate sort of love; while I regarded its ancient ruins with as much veneration, and cherished every legend connected with them as tenderly, as if the land of my birth had always been my home.

And the ocean—what should I do away from it? Though, when sad, its boundless expanse and mighty, eternal roar had always made me more sad, yet I loved it, and, perhaps, more than all else. The broad, beautiful, free Atlantic—its very name had a peculiar charm for me.

But let me proceed.

I went out. As I left the house, I thought the grounds had a more than usually dead and dreary look. It might have been my own fancy, or the March afternoon, which was chill and gloomy, though calm, that made them seem so, but I shivered as if with cold, as I walked down the avenue.

On reaching the gate, I was surprised to find that the key was not in it, as usual, and that the bolts were drawn across, which was never done till dark.

I was turning towards the lodge, intending

to ask the man who resided there, to open the gate for me, when I perceived that it was shut up, and evidently uninhabited.

For a moment I stood still, not daring to think what this might mean, but yet, with a terrible unformed suspicion in my mind, which all at once took shape, and I threw myself, in a fit of despair, on the grass, beside the barred gate. I was a prisoner—that was what it meant. Mrs. Baker and I were both prisoners. Mr. Verney had discovered, in some way, our intention of leaving on the following day.

I lay with my face buried among the long grass, heedless of its dampness, and of the chill air, for about an hour. Sometimes I felt almost as if my senses were leaving me. There seemed no mode of escape—no way of obtaining help. In everything that I had attempted—every step that I had taken from

the first—I had been defeated and overreached. Such a web had been woven around me as it appeared impossible to break through. If Cecil called, he would not be admitted. Entrance might be forced at last, but perhaps too late.

My miserable thoughts were at last disturbed by hearing a footstep coming along the path, and then pausing near me. I raised my head, and saw Donal. Instantly I sprang towards him. It was a poor hope, a very poor hope, to try to move old Donal.

"The gate is locked," I said, trying to subdue my tone of terror, and speak as usual.

"Ay," he returned, with a grin, I thought, of triumph on his face, "locked fast, bedad, an' bolted."

"Well, unfasten it for me, I want to go out."

"There's many a wan wants to do what they

can't do, and you be wan o' them, I'm thinkin'," he returned, oracularly.

"What do you mean. I can go out if I like."

"No, you can't," snapped he, rudely.

I saw it was useless to continue longer the tone I had adopted. I had now definitely ascertained that I was a prisoner.

"Open the gate and let me go," I cried, my voice trembling so that I could scarcely command it. "You know where the key is, get it, I entreat you, and let me go. Oh, for once, at least, be kind, be generous; have some pity upon me. You know what Mr. Verney is, help me to escape from him. It can't do you any good to keep me here. Do, do open the gate and let me go."

I had laid my hand upon his arm, partly to detain him—for he seemed every moment as if about to turn away—and was looking im-

ploringly into his face, the expression of which was anything but encouraging.

"Mebbe it can, an' mebbe it can't," he answered, shaking me off rather roughly. "Any ways, it 'ud do me no good to let ye go. And d'ye know this, me hinny? I'd far sooner be afther doin' a turn to injure ye, than to sarve ye, bedad would I. I niver liked ye, ye was always obstinate, an' too fond o' makin' guesses and o' thinkin'—a thing naither you nor any other faymale has any right to do. An' iv late I had a dale o' throuble wid ye, runnin' afther ye, an' watchin' ye for ever. Sich long walks ye used to take! Oh, Moses! an' I obleeged to folly always, for fear ye'd be goin' aff altogether some day. I'm thankful, anyhow, that's put a stop to. I can stay at home now, an' mind thim clocks, which, be the way, have got into a mortial state, instid o' clod-

hoppin' over the entire counthry. Open the gate an' let her go! Bedad, it's likely ould Donal 'ud be afther doin' sich a thing!" in a tone of extreme scorn. "Have some pity! An' who ever heerd of Donal Dhue havin' pity? It's a word he doesn't know the manin' of, me dear. Ax thim tenants as aren't ready wid their rint whin he calls, if he does. Open the gate an' let her go! Whew!" with disgust. "An' for nothin' but love an' pure philan—philanthrometry. She does't even offer me so much as a brass button. Sure the like o' sich assurance an' black ingratitude niver was seen."

I was not aware that I had any occasion for gratitude towards old Donal, but his last words gave me a new idea.

"If you will agree," I said, "to allow Mrs. Baker and me to leave to-morrow morning without Mr. Verney's knowledge, you shall

be rewarded. I have no money now, but when I have, I will pay you whatever sum you arrange; and I have a bracelet and brooch of some value, that I will give you at once."

"An' how much might they be worth?" asked Donal, drawing nearer, a greedy sparkle in his weasel eyes.

"I don't know exactly; about ten or twelve pounds, I should say, perhaps something more."

"For aich?" inquired Donal.

"No, I mean that much might be got for both."

"Oh, by gor; sich an offer to be afther makin'! Oh, Moses! sich an offer!" ejaculated the old man, looking all round him. "Did ever any born craythur hear the like o' this? ten or twelve pounds! If aich was to *bring* fifty, sartin, I'd have hesitated, an'

mebbe said *no* to the bargain in the end. By gor, ye ought to be ashamed o' yerself, ye ought. Oh, dear, dear!"

"But I promise that you shall have money afterwards, as large a sum as you name."

"Oh, ay, iv coorse, I may name as large a sum as I plase, seein' it's on'y namin'. Wanst ye war out o' this, a single blessed rap I'd ever see. Sure, don't I know that whin ye'd get to Dublin, Mr. Nugent there 'ud tell ye that sich promises war made for naught but to be broke."

"But I would not break it. I would not allow myself to be persuaded to do so by any one. I solemnly declare to you that what I promise, I will fulfil, no matter who may oppose it. I will pay you a hundred pounds if you will allow Mrs. Baker and me to go tomorrow. Will that be enough? Say so, if it's not."

"Oh, it's no matther what's enough an' what isn't. Sure it's on'y talkin'. If ye war to offer me ten hundher in that sort o' coin, sorra a bit readier I'd be to open that there gate for ye. All's not done yit, an' I may be able to do somethin' betther nor that for meself, asily."

Saying this, he walked away. I knew it would be quite useless to importune him any longer. There was nothing in his nature, except cupidity, to which I could appeal with any chance of success, and that, I had not the means of satisfying.

In more deep despair than before, I again threw myself on the grass. How long I lay there, I do not know. I think I must have been in a sort of swoon, for afterwards I had no recollection of what I thought, and the time passed over unheeded by me.

When at last I stood up, it was dusk, and

the moon, of a fiery red hue, had just risen above the horizon. I remember thinking vaguely, as I looked at it, that it portended storm.

When I went into the house, I told Mrs. Baker of our imprisonment. She was greatly alarmed for my sake.

That night, at past midnight, I was sitting in my room, still in the same stunned state of mind, when I suddenly became conscious of a great noise and tumult in the house—of voices raised high in angry dispute. It had been going on for some time in a lesser degree, but though I had heard it, I had not heeded or thought about it.

Now I opened the door. The voices proceeded from Mr. Verney's study, and were those of himself and old Donal. I went out on the stairs to listen. Mrs. Baker was there,

leaning over the bannisters; the noise had aroused her from sleep.

"Whist!" she said, holding up her finger as I approached; and I stood beside her in silence.

Louder and louder rose the voices, and angrier and angrier. Mr. Verney's was deep and hoarse, like the roll of distant thunder—the old steward's shrill and defiant. He seemed threatening. The word *money* was often repeated by both. Several times, I fancied I heard my own name. But suddenly, that of Catherine reached our ears, uttered by Donal.

I started, and Mrs. Baker leant more forward to listen. The name was repeated, but we could not hear in what connection. We could only catch stray words, for the door was thick, and Mrs. Baker and I at some distance from it.

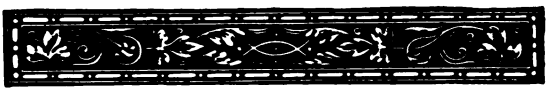
"I must hear what they are saying about poor Miss Catherine," said Mrs. Baker, and she was moving to go downstairs.

But, at that moment, the door of the room was violently thrown open, and old Donal rushed out. He went at once to his own room.

Mrs. Baker and I lingered about for a while; but all was quiet, and there appeared no sign of the disturbance being renewed.

The only sounds that now broke the silence of the house, were the continued and monotonous tread of Mr. Verney's footsteps, as he paced heavily—never seeming to pause for a moment—up and down his den, and the muttering of the old man, who was talking excitedly to himself, and appeared to be dragging about articles of furniture.

We returned at length to our rooms; but, about half an hour after I had entered mine, I was startled by hearing the hall-door opened, and then slammed to with a violence that shook the house.



CHAPTER XV.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

I HAVE now come to that part of my story when the event, whose dark shadow has overcast these pages, even from the first, must take form and substance. And now that the time has really arrived, my heart almost fails me, and I would fain shrink from the task I appointed myself. But I have begun, and must finish.

Next morning, the old steward was nowhere to be found, and his trunk had vanished; also a clock which had hung in his own room, and which he had always been particularly

fond of rooting at. It was the very one I had seen him boiling on the evening of my arrival.

Of late I had noticed that Donal's manner to Mr. Verney had grown very disrespectful, and that he seemed dissatisfied. Whatever caused this, had evidently reached its culminating point last night, and he had quitted the house in indignation. The time I had heard the door clap must have been when he left.

I had, on several occasions, seen strange expressions on Mr. Verney's countenance, but never before had I beheld such a strange, such a frightful look as it wore this day. He made no allusion to old Donal's departure, or, indeed, uttered a word on any subject.

He wandered restlessly about the house and grounds. I encountered him several times, for I was restless, too, and I thought

he looked more like a walking corpse than a living man—his face was so livid in hue, his features so set and stony looking. He passed me always without a word, almost as if he did not see me, though I met the glare of his dreadful eyes.

The day was chill and dull, like the preceding one, but with a low wind, which wailed and moaned ceaselessly, in a manner more dispiriting to listen to than any louder blast. The sky was of a peculiar colour, and the clouds were hurrying along strangely. A storm was evidently threatening. The red moon of the night before had foretold truly.

Towards evening, Mr. Verney locked himself into his den.

A little after ten o'clock, the storm burst in all its fury. Oh, how it raged round the house! as if its object were to root it up from its foundations—I hear it in my ears now.

Oh, how it shrieked down the chimneys! Oh, with what a deafening roar the giants leaped upon the strand, and died, but not unavenged, scattering destruction around them as they expired.

It was the greatest storm I had ever witnessed—the greatest, indeed, I afterwards heard, remembered by any one in that part of the country, celebrated as it is for storms.

I could not think of going to bed. Every moment I expected that some of the chimneys would fall, or that the old crumbling western turret would be blown down.

The wind blew in gusts. Sometimes there would be a calm, when nothing would be heard but a low, mournful moaning, which, gradually, would grow louder and louder, and wilder and wilder, till it attained its utmost pitch, and then it would rave with desperate and ungovernable fury for some

time, like a mad thing trying to break all bounds and destroy everything before it.

Two or three times, in the midst of the most furious gusts, there arose a prolonged shriek, that seemed so separate and distinct, so piercing, so full of almost human agony, that it reminded me of nothing but the descriptions I had heard of the banshee's cry.

I walked up and down the room, and felt the floor shake beneath me. The whole house was shaking. Sometimes I sat down for a few minutes; sometimes I paused before the window, and looked up at the dense black clouds, which were flying in a mass across the sky, followed closely by a second mass, which looked as if pursuing the first.

This sight, and the spray from the ocean, which rose up high into the air, were all that *I beheld.*

At last, wearied out, I threw myself, dressed as I was, upon the outside of the bed —with no intention of sleeping; I thought that would be impossible.

In the intervals between the gusts, I heard the monotonous tapping of my door. Of late I had become so accustomed to it, that I had learned not to mind it much; but, somehow, this night, it aroused in me the same thoughts and fancies as the first time I had listened to it. And the eyes in the shutters—which I had fastened across before lying down, to keep out the wind—fascinated my gaze, as they had done the first night. The paper which I had stuffed them with had remained there till now, when the wind had blown it out, and they were staring full upon me, with a more menacing look than ever, I thought.

Suddenly, I recollected that this night was

the anniversary of that on which I had come to Verney Court, and I began to think of all that had occurred during the past year, and of what my own feelings had been that night, lying here, when as yet I was unacquainted with those who were to exercise so strong an influence over my life, having only just heard the name of Cecil Nugent. How strange that seemed!

And Catherine, who had then but appeared on the scene, and now had so completely and mysteriously vanished from it—the echoes of her merry voice were then still lingering in the gloomy chamber, which she had not long left, and I was still seeing before me her exquisite face and form, as she leant with dimpled arm upon the mantel-piece, and gazed critically into the mirror, wondering if the reflection it gave back were really the most *beautiful* in the world, as she had been told.

At length, however, I fell into a troubled sleep, in which I still heard the raging of the storm, and, in the intervals of low moaning, the tapping of the door. Every few minutes I partially awoke, disturbed by some frightful dream, the import of which I could not recall, only I knew that Mr. Verney and Catherine were always prominent, and I seemed to have a vague, tormenting consciousness of having been troubled by those same dreams before, only I could not remember when.

I suppose this sort of unquiet slumber may have continued for two hours, and it was somewhere about three o'clock, when I was suddedly awakened by feeling a touch—light, but deadly cold—laid upon my forehead.

Instantly I opened my eyes, and they rested upon a white figure standing by the

bedside, still and motionless as a marble statue, or a human form that had suddenly been turned to stone. The masses of tangled golden hair, which swept over the shoulders and across the bosom, lay there as still as if no beating heart stirred beneath. One hand drooped by the side, the other was slightly raised, and through the torn drapery which fell from the shoulder, gleamed forth an arm, rounded, and exquisitely formed, but so wan, so transparent, that it hardly seemed palpable.

While I gazed, my eyeballs strained with the intentness, and a deadly chill gathering round my heart, the figure slightly moved, and a light shone upon the face. I did not then pause to consider whence the light came, or what it was, though I was aware that it was neither that of the moon nor of the sun, and I saw it playing upon the opposite wall, in a strange fitful manner.

Whatever it was, it enabled me to see the features distinctly, and, though pale, and haggard, and changed, I knew them well—it was Catherine—or her spirit—that stood before me!

I had but a moment to gaze, for, at the instant that I made this discovery, and before I had time to collect my senses, the figure moved towards the door, and, uttering some unintelligible word, glided rapidly from the room.

After the first few moments of bewildered inaction, I sprang up, and rushed into the corridor. I thought I discerned a form vanishing down the long western gallery, towards the ruined, blocked-up wing, and was about to follow, when I became conscious of something dense, that seemed to stop my progress. I stretched out my hands. It was smoke. A dense, black volume was issuing

from the gallery. It was impossible to proceed through it.

I flew back to the staircase and looked over. The whole lower part of the house was enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke, through which, to my horror, I saw fierce tongues of flame shooting forth. I ran down a few steps, but was obliged to return. There was no escape that way.

I re-entered my room, and, rushing to the window, unfastened the shutters, and threw it open. The blast that swept in nearly threw me down, and I had to cling to the sash for support. How fearfully the storm would fan the flames, how very swift make the work of destruction!

I listened intently for a few minutes for any sound of life, but heard only the roaring of the tempest. Alone! alone! in the midst of such horrors! Oh! it was awful! What

would I not have given then for the presence of any human being? Even to hear the most distant tone of a human voice? No one but me seemed to be in the house or near it. I must have been forgotten, or supposed to have escaped. I felt abandoned, forsaken. As I clung to the window, half-kneeling, half-standing, holding on by the sash, I raised my eyes to the frowning sky, which was now tinged with an angry red, and tried to pray, but the words died upon my lips and in my heart—it did not seem to me at that moment as if those heavens could hold a pitying God.

I ran out to the corridor again, and looked over the bannisters. The flames were rising higher and higher. They had advanced several steps since I had been out before. I returned, and again listened at the window, hoping to hear some token of coming help;

but still, only the voice of the storm, mingled now with the fierce crackling of the flames as they leaped up the stairs, and approached every moment nearer to their prey. Soon they would be in the room with me. How soon? I wondered.

In my frantic terror, and sense of desolation, I thought of throwing myself from the window, and determined that I would, when the flames were actually about to lay hold of me.

Suddenly, I thought I heard voices outside, at another part of the house, and I screamed aloud; but though I raised my voice as much as I could—and it must have been sharp with terror—I could hardly hear it myself, for the roaring of the elements. What hope, then, that others could? It was all useless, all vain. I sank down upon the *floor*, which felt hot beneath me.

The room was now filled with a thick, suffocating smoke. I felt stupefied and choked by it. My head seemed dizzy; there was a humming noise in my ears, a dimness over my eyes. Gradually the horror of my situation became less and less. A merciful oblivion began to steal over my senses.

All that occurred after is vague and indistinct. I have a recollection of hearing Cecil's voice; of being borne through flames in his arms; of feeling the cool wind blowing once more upon my cheek.

When I recovered consciousness, I was lying in a cottage on the moor, and Mrs. Baker was bending over me.

It seemed to me as if days, or at least hours, must have passed since the time when, giving myself up for lost, I had sunk upon the floor, but, in reality, scarcely half-an-hour

could have elapsed, as I learned from Mrs. Baker.

"Catherine," I said, faintly, "has she been saved?"

Mrs. Baker looked surprised, and made no reply. I repeated the question.

"What makes you be thinking of Miss Catherine, now, alanna?" she said, soothingly, and then I heard her whisper to the woman whose cottage we were in, and who was standing by, that my mind must be wandering.

It was evident, then, that no one had seen Catherine. I must have been dreaming when I thought I beheld her, for what could have brought her there at that time of night? and how could she have got into the house? Various remnants of dreams were floating about in my mind, and though the impression this had left was more vivid, it, too, *must* have been only a dream.

This was the only reasonable conclusion at which I could arrive.

I then inquired as to the manner of my rescue. Cecil had seen the fire from Hazelgrove, and rode at once to the spot, where he found a scene of terrible confusion—everybody shouting through the storm, and nobody knowing what to do.

The discovery had just been made that I had not escaped. He made some of the people run for ladders. None were long enough to reach to the window, but, several being tied together with ropes, one of sufficient length was made, and he rushed up through the flames and suffocating smoke, and rescued me at the risk of his life. He had received some injuries, of which he made very light, but I was unhurt, though part of my dress had been burned away.

"Is the fire still going on?" I asked Mrs. Baker.

"Yes," and she pointed to the red light on the wall of the cottage.

So was the storm, for just then there came a gust of fearful fury, and I saw the reflection of the flames leap up high, and stream all across the floor. I could not bear to lie still, and, after a few minutes, I got up, though Mrs. Baker wanted me not, and went to the door.

Cecil was standing at it. He offered me his arm. I took it in silence. I could not thank him then for having saved me from the fearful death I had so nearly suffered, for the noise of the storm, mingled with the roaring of the ocean and the crackling of the flames, was so tremendous that it rendered speech impossible. So, leaning on his arm, I gazed in silence at the picturesque, but awful spectacle before me.

The trees near the house had caught fire,

and tossed about their gaunt, burning arms, like living creatures in agony. The whole building was now one body of glowing flame. The blazes, shooting up fiercely to the sky, appeared to have set on fire the dark clouds that overhung it, as well as the surrounding atmosphere.

The red glow of the conflagration seemed to extend for miles around, and by its light we saw the mountains, and the country about us, with an extraordinary distinctness. But the most fearfully magnificent thing of all to see, was the ocean. One vast mass of molten fire, it seethed and boiled awfully, and the giants, as they rushed in, appeared to be all in a blaze.

I was gazing upon this sight when suddenly a shriek—wild and despairing—rose fearfully above all the tumult. I turned, shuddering, towards the burning house, from

whence it seemed to come, and there, at the window of the ruined chamber—from which the boards that had blocked it up were burnt away—Catherine stood, surrounded by flames!

With an exclamation of horror and amazement, Cecil sprang forward; but, at that moment, down, with a dreadful crash, thundered the turret above, crushing in the roof as it fell.

I saw a vast column of smoke arise, a shower of sparks shoot up to the sky, a dull, sullen glare succeed to the former crimson glow; heard the mountain echoes, from far and near, repeat that thrilling shriek in every variety of tone, as if lost spirits were crying from out the tempest. Then everything seemed to swim round; the sparks danced and floated before my eyes. All grew dark.

I remember no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD DONAL'S CONFESSION.

For weeks, I lay in a state of unconsciousness. Fever came on, and, at one time, I believe my recovery was almost despaired of.

Though dead to all around me, I was keenly alive always to the sense of suffering, and to the images of terror that thronged my brain. No distinct memory seemed to remain of the last terrible scene I had witnessed, nor did the delusions under which I laboured, appear to be directly suggested by it.

At last, the fever began to abate. I remember well the first day on which I opened

my eyes and looked about me, conscious of what I saw.

I had been sleeping quietly. At first on awakening, though I had an impression that something dreadful had occurred, I could not remember what it was, and I felt too weak and nerveless to try much.

The room in which I lay seemed strange. It certainly was not my own, I thought. I must have been removed to some other. Yet, this apartment was not like any at Verney Court. It was much smaller and brighter looking, and everything was arranged with scrupulous neatness. The time appeared to be evening, for the sun had cast long shadows upon the floor.

As I lay, gazing dreamily about me, by degrees, and without any effort of mine, the recollection of all that had happened dawned

upon me, and at the remembrance I shuddered, and heaved a deep sigh.

I had thought that I was alone; but some one appeared to have been sitting by my bedside, who, at this sound, arose, and drew back the curtains.

I closed my eyes again, and feigned to sleep, not wishing to speak, or be spoken to.

"Thank God! the fever is gone," I heard a voice murmur, as a cool hand was laid upon my forehead. "But more care than ever will be needed now plenty of nourishment wine teaspoonful at first jelly make some this very evening so I will new receipt white of egg boil ten minutes or twelve not quite sure must look change of scene when get stronger best thing in the world it is so it is."

At this moment, the door was gently

opened, and Mrs. Preston—for of course, I knew it was she—dropped the curtain.

"How is she?" asked the person who had entered, in a whisper. The voice was that of Mrs. Baker.

"Getting on finely fever quite gone very weak of course will be so for some time must be expected so it must beef tea claret Italy or some other place of that sort perhaps nearer home just as good only variety nothing like it that's what I say mixed with water at first very strengthening I declare so it is," replied Mrs Preston, in an equally low tone, but with her accustomed rapidity of utterance.

"If you stay here now I'll see about it at once so I will."

And again the door was softly opened, while Mrs. Baker took her seat by my bedside.

My recovery was slow; but at last—*thanks* to the untiring care of good Mrs.

Preston, who was unequalled as a nurse, and of Mrs. Baker—I did recover. It had proved fortunate for me that the Prestons had returned home the day before the fire, as they had insisted upon my being brought to their house.

As I became stronger, I gradually learned everything that had occurred during my illness. Some I did not hear for a long time, but I will mention all in this place.

The morning after the fire, Cecil's uncle had arrived with officers of justice to arrest Mr. Verney, on the evidence of his steward, for the murder of Charles Graydon.

They came too late, however, for that purpose. Mr. Verney had then passed beyond the reach of earthly justice—he was dead. Yet he had not perished in the flames.

When the ruin had cooled sufficiently to allow any one to approach it, he had been

found seated upright in his study chair, a bottle, labelled "Prussic acid," grasped in his hand. By his own act he had died.

It was supposed that, on finding the steward gone, and being so surrounded with difficulties, he had resolved to take poison. Probably he had taken it soon after retiring to his room, and long before the fire broke out.

The body, though blackened by smoke, was, strange to say, untouched by fire, as was also most of the furniture in the apartment.

The old man's account was as follows:—

He had been an eye-witness of Mr. Graydon's death. After Mrs. Baker had returned to the house with her mistress, Donal, concealed behind a hedge, had seen what passed.

The two had walked on, engaged in fierce dispute, till they stood almost on the verge of a precipice overhanging the sea. Donal had crept on after them. He had seen Mr.

Verney strike Graydon; he had seen them struggle together, and at length he had seen Mr. Verney hurl Graydon—who, from the first, had been nearest the precipice—over its edge, into the sea below. He had not dared to speak to Mr. Verney till he was again on the road, and near home. Then he told him what he had witnessed, and declared that, unless he would agree to his terms, he would give instant information.

The conditions of his silence were, that he should be payed a certain large sum of money at once, and afterwards, at stated intervals, receive the same, and that Mr. Verney should take him into his household.

Though greatly averse to having this witness of his crime before him continually, watching him always, and holding a sword, as it were, for ever above his head, Mr. Verney had no choice but to consent.

The old man's strongest point was love of money, and the fact that he was to possess a portion of the rents, accounted for his harshness to the tenantry in collecting them. This, too, was the cause of his anxiety for Catherine's marriage with Cecil, from whom he expected that Mr. Verney would be able to borrow money to meet his demand.

His enmity to Shane O'Reilly was caused by the fear that he had heard something from "The Man of the Wreck," which led him to suspect their guilty secret.

This idea, he communicated to Mr. Verney, and both agreed that it would be better to get Shane out of the neighbourhood. When the plan of evicting him for non-payment of rent, was defeated, Mr. Verney schemed to get him arrested and cast into prison.

Of late, Mr. Verney had not had money to

give Donal, in consequence of another demand upon him—that of Horton.

The pocket-book and ring, which Horton had found among the rocks, had evidently dropped from Graydon during the struggle, or when he fell. But Mr. Verney, not knowing of this—as Horton had not told what were the proofs he had against him—it was no wonder he should be horrified and bewildered when, after so long a time, he beheld, glittering upon his daughter's hand, the identical ring which he believed lay upon a skeleton finger, at the bottom of the sea.

From the time that the advertisement offering the reward appeared, Donal had been continually threatening to claim it, and it was in order to obtain money for him, that Mr. Verney had made such desperate attempts to get possession of my fortune.

The letter, purporting to have been written by my father, Donal knew to be a forgery. He had himself been a party to the plan, had, indeed, he confessed, first proposed it.

The confession of the old man also cleared up the mystery about Catherine.

All through the winter, while I had been thinking that she was far away in some gay, Continental city, immersed in pleasure, and the admired of all who beheld her, she had been pining in misery and madness, beneath the same roof with me.

The night after that on which she had effected her escape from her own room, she had been found by old Donal, hiding in an uninhabited hut, and conveyed to the ruined chamber, which, in order to make more secure, had been cut off from all communication with the rest of the house.

The incautious words she had uttered on

the morning of the interview with her father, had been fatal to her, as they had led him to believe that she had, in some way, become acquainted with his crime.

Whether this were really the fact, Donal did not know; but I knew that when she had called Mr. Verney a murderer, it was of the murder of her mother she suspected him.

When the letter from Cecil arrived, informing Mr. Verney that his daughter had not eloped with Charles Graydon, he had tried to persuade old Donal to poison Catherine; but one faint spark of softer feeling yet lingered in the old man's nature, and he positively refused to do it.

Catherine had been kind to him once when he was sick, and none of the servants would go near him.

For the last few months it appeared that she

had been insane. The absence on the night of the fire, of her jailor, Donal, had probably enabled her to get out of her prison.

This was the substance of Donal's confession.

Oh, Catherine! beautiful, ill-fated Catherine! child of misfortune, what a doom was yours!

How dreadful these months of imprisonment must have been—who can ever know! In darkness and loneliness, never seeing any face but that of your rude jailor, never hearing any sound but the eternal booming of the ocean, and the dirge-like wailing of the wind—what marvel that your restless and impatient spirit, which never could brook even an hour's restraint, and was always panting for change and excitement, fretted itself to madness.

Ah! how little I thought that fatal morning when the door closed between us, and I

caught the last glimpse of your bright hair and fluttering dress, that never more, oh, never more, should I again see, at least, as then—that face of radiant beauty, that little golden head, that slender, graceful form, never, never more.

No, wonder, Catherine, that a mystic shadow should have slept in your eyes; no wonder that your moods, at times, should have been dark and despondent! And those strange dreams which troubled you even from earliest childhood—were they warnings? Did the gentle mother, unable to rest even in Heaven, hover about the bed of her wayward child, seeking to guide and counsel her in the only way she could? It may have been so.

Then why, oh, why, Catherine, did you slight those warnings? Why did you not fly to the shelter pointed out to you? There was a rose-strewn path which you might have

trodden, but, with wilful foot, you spurned aside the roses that sprang around you, and clasped the thorn to your breast. Ah, poor Catherine!

In a corner of the churchyard, where her equally unfortunate mother lies, there is a stone on which is engraved the name of Catherine Verney. But no coffin rests beneath. The ashes of that once bright and beautiful being have no grave but such as the winds which scattered them may have given.

Of course, all the peasantry believe that the lonely, blackened ruin in the hollow is haunted. And they will tell you how, on stormy nights, the figure of the ill-fated Catherine may be seen, with streaming hair, and outstretched arms, as if imploring help, at the window of the chamber where she met her doom; while beneath, round and round, *stalks* the grim phantom of Julian Verney.

The origin of the fire was never discovered. The opinions regarding it were various. Instead, however, of setting down any particular one, I will mention all, that the reader may take his choice as to which he will adopt.

It was supposed by some, that Catherine, in effecting her escape, had, either by accident or design, set fire to the house. By others, that Mr. Verney had done so before taking the poison. But it was the opinion of a few, that the flames had been kindled by some of the tenants, to avenge the death of Shane O'Reilly.

None of these explanations, however, suited the imaginative minds of the peasantry, and most of them firmly believed that the fire had been caused by supernatural agency.

The old steward's object in giving information, had been solely for the sake of the

reward he expected to receive. Though the sharer of so guilty a secret, no twinges of conscience appeared to have ever disturbed him.

The whole affair was a matter of money with him; for it, he was willing to do anything—good, bad, or indifferent, it was of no consequence, so as it brought him money; and when Mr. Verney had not sufficient to satisfy him, he went to those from whom he thought he could obtain it.

He was defeated, however. Some questions being asked, at first carelessly, about his former life, and sudden appearance on the night of Graydon's death, in a part of the country where he had never been seen before, he became confused, and gave unsatisfactory answers, which aroused suspicions.

Inquiries being made, he was discovered to be a criminal who had escaped from prison, and fled to these Western Highlands as a safe

place of hiding. Therefore, instead of receiving his hundred pounds, he received sentence of penal servitude for life.

My task is done. But it may be there are a few who would like to hear something of my after life.

When I was sufficiently recovered, I left the Prestons, and went to reside with Mr. Nugent, Cecil's uncle, whom I looked upon as my rightful guardian; it having clearly been my father's real wish and intention, that he should be so.

But I do not live with him now. Hazelgrove is my home. It is from it that I write. I am happy, very happy; how could I be otherwise? And so is my husband, though sometimes a dark cloud will overcast his brow; but, thank Heaven, I am not powerless to chase it away.

Now, the grim Horror, which I summoned

up, vanishes. The life of gloom and terror that was mine for one dreadful year, flits back to its place in the past; but another life has taken its room, in which is no darkness and no terror. For, O Cecil! O my husband! dearer each succeeding year, thou art with me; and, leaning on thy arm, that feels so strong and steady, I could pass serene through life, deeming its evils no evils, just as, if torn from that arm, I should deem its pleasures no pleasures.

But Catherine—she sleeps. Well, *requiescat in pace.*

THE END.

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